

**Linguistic Landscapes, Assemblages, and Affective Regimes in
Chongqing's Public Transport Hubs: From Transit Spaces to
Meaningful Places**

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

Signature

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Authorship Attribution Statement

Small sections of my thesis have been accepted as conference abstracts and published online at [Linguistic Landscape Workshop 15](#), [the 21st International Association of Applied Linguistics \(AILA\) World Congress](#), and [the Sociolinguistics Symposium 25](#).

The material is related to the Abstract and Chapter 5 of this thesis, respectively. I claim that all aspects of the research design and writing are my original work.

Signature

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Date: 02 June 2026

Gen AI Attribution Statement

During the preparation of the thesis the author used ChatGPT for the purposes of text enhancement. The use of this generative AI tool includes paraphrasing and grammar checking. The author confirms that where text was modified by generative AI, the content was reviewed for possible errors, inaccuracies, and bias. The author takes full responsibility for the submitted thesis and ensures the work is their own and has used generative AI within [the parameters of use](#).

Signature

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the linguistic landscape (LL) shapes the social functions of public transport hubs and generates patterned affective experiences in Chongqing, a megacity in Southwestern China. Responding to the largely quantitative focus of prior LL research in China, this thesis advances an interpretive and theoretical informed analysis of how signage mediates relations among people, space, affect, and mobility.

Drawing on three rounds of large-scale data collection, this thesis first maps the categories, spatial distribution, and linguistic composition of signage across six major transport modes. This quantitative overview identifies key semiotic features and notes changes in the institutional and social functions of these transport hubs. Building on this foundation, an in-depth qualitative analysis of Chongqing North High-Speed Railway Station employs Pennycook's (2017) assemblage and Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics framework to examine the dynamic interactions among linguistic and semiotic resources, passengers, and differentiated spatial zones.

The analysis is further extended to Jiangbei International Airport, where Wee and Goh's (2019) concept of affective regimes is integrated with Bourdieusian notions of affect and capital to elucidate how passengers' emotions are structured, circulated, and rendered socially productive across interconnected online and offline contexts.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates how LL transforms transport hubs from sites of transit into multifunctional and meaningful places through co-constitutive sign–people–space relations. It also shows how affect is institutionally organised and implicated in the production of social functions within regimes of mobility. Empirically, this thesis contributes a rich and systematic corpus to LL research on China and transport infrastructures; theoretically, it advances the integration of assemblage and affect in LL scholarship. The thesis concludes by outlining directions for future comparative and diachronic research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Context of the research

Linguistic landscape (LL) examines how written signs are displayed, organised, and regulated in public space. Existing studies have demonstrated the vital role of signage in place-making as it indexes social meaning, power relations, identity, policy, affect, and so on (e.g. Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Huebner, 2006; Leeman & Modan, 2009). The expanded focus from written language to semiotic and multimodal environments aligns LL research with wider urban studies such as mobility studies, which highlights infrastructures, the circulation and organisation of movements as constitutive features of metropolises (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Public transport hubs, whose dense semiotic systems coordinate urban development and mobility under tight institutional regulation, emerge as particularly conformable environment. Methodologically, signage in transport spaces is typically produced and regulated by government agencies. This strong top-down character makes public transport hub an ideal empirical site for looking at institutional practices including language policy and public management, and for investigating power relations placed in public spheres.

The broad territory, cultural background, and unique socio-linguistic resources of The People's Republic of China constitute a particularly rich context for LL research. While the state has worked towards a national popularisation of standardised spoken Mandarin and Simplified Chinese characters since the late 20th century (Sun & Zhou, 2004), China remains a multilingual nation with a complex linguistic ecology. There are 55 officially recognised ethnic minority groups speaking a range of minority languages and numerous regional varieties of Sinitic languages. Rapid urbanisation, economic reform, and global connectivity further increase the linguistic diversity of public spaces. Foreign languages, most notably English, are increasingly visible on signs in public setting, carrying both symbolic meanings linked to commodification and globalisation, and physical functions of informing and communicating (e.g. Danielewicz-Betz & Graddol, 2014; Lu, et al., 2020; Xiao & Lee, 2022).

Chongqing, the transport centre in southwestern China, has a number of distinctive geographical features which prove challenging for public construction works. The city is built in mountainous terrain and its urban areas are densely populated, resulting in a highly complex city transport system. In recent years the transport system in Chongqing has even become recognised as a destination in of itself, attracting visitors who post their experiences to social media. These features make public transport hubs in Chongqing more than physically functional infrastructure, but symbolic spaces which epitomise the city's image. Public transport spaces are used by large volumes of people on a daily basis, these spaces are designed to communicate with and provide transportation services to people of different backgrounds. They represent both mobility within a city and a city's means of connecting with broader areas and diverse visitors (Backhaus, 2006). Signage in these spaces is therefore a strong indicator of language use and social life.

Despite the growing interest, within the LL literature there remains a lack of comprehensive and in-depth research focused on Chinese cities, and in the context of

transportation hubs. Chongqing as a site of focus is similarly underexplored. To address these gaps, the present study examines and interprets LL in Chongqing's main public transport hubs through a mixed-methods approach which integrates different research instruments and data sources. First, it draws on a broad quantitative analysis of 14 public transport hubs across six different modes, employing an original three three-dimensional taxonomy that classifies LL data by function and content, language, and format. Second, it highlights focused qualitative analyses on two representative large-scale transport hubs, which present richer datasets, a wider range of sign types, and more comparable internal variables. The qualitative analyses underscores four theoretical frameworks: assemblage and geosemiotics are applied to examine LL's role in operating different social functions at Chongqing North High-speed Railway station as a multi-functional large-scale hub; affective regimes and Bourdieusian notion of capital are then employed to analysis how LL shapes passengers' affective experiences at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport as an international hub. Discussions and findings are grounded in layered interpretations from a nuanced understanding of the research field and situated within the context of Chongqing's historical, cultural, and social background.

1.2 Chongqing: a megacity in Southwestern China

Chongqing, famous as “山城” (the mountainous city) for its complex geographical features, is a megacity locates in Southwest China in the interior of the upper Yangtze River basin. The total area under Chongqing is 8.24 square kilometres, consists of 38 districts and counties, with 9 districts at the centre of the city forming the core urban area (Deng et al., 2020). At the end of 2024, the permanent resident population was approximately 31.9 million, within which the urban resident population was 23 million (Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2025).¹

¹ 《2024 年重庆市国民经济和社会发展统计公报 (Statistical Communiqué on the 2024 National Economic and Social Development of Chongqing Municipality) 》 .
https://wap.cq.gov.cn/zwgk/zfxgkml/sjfb_120853/tjgb/202505/t20250523_14650426.html

Until the last century the city was part of Sichuan Province. In 1997, Chongqing was separated from Sichuan Province, becoming the fourth municipality² in China. Chongqing functions as a major business and transportation hub in contemporary China, while continuing to gain development opportunities that support its transformation into an international metropolitan centre. Economically, as the core member of the “Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle”, the largest economic circle in southwest China (Wu et al., 2024), Chongqing plays a leading role in driving development across western China. In trade, Chongqing is widely positioned as a key inland gateway of the Belt & Road Initiative, one of the world’s largest infrastructure projects encompassing economic ambition, policy coordination, and people-to people exchange, and serving as an important origin point for China-Europe rail freight services which links domestic economic corridors with international routes across Central Asia and Europe (Huang, 2016; Thürer et al., 2020). Meanwhile, it is also notable for its extensive transport infrastructures and multi-modal logistics capacity. The strong mix of river, road, rail, air logistics makes Chongqing a key node connecting regional production and consumption to national networks.

The modern-day importance of Chongqing is a continuation of its historic significance. In ancient China, Chongqing was a part of the Bashu area, the centre of ancient civilisation in the upper Yangtze River region, with rich linguistic and cultural heritages (Gan, 2023). During WWII, Chongqing was the temporary capital of Republican China (Chang, 2022). In the mid-1990s, it was the site of the world’s largest hydropower project, the “Three Gorges Dam”.³ The scale of population resettlement, resource management, and construction works accompanying this grand project are testament to Chongqing’s vital geographical role within China (Lim & Horesh, 2017).

Owing to its rich history, modern economic significance, dramatic mountainous landscape, and distinctive urban aesthetics Chongqing has also experienced rapid

² Province-level cities, directly under the central government. The other three are: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin.

³ A massive hydroelectric and flood-control project on the Yangtze River.

growth in tourism in recent years. Chongqing has become known as a “cyberpunk” metropolis, with images of the city frequently going viral on international social media (Roast, 2024). According to the *Statistical Bulletin of Chongqing's Tourism Industry in 2024*, Chongqing welcomed approximately 473 million domestic tourists and 1.28 million international visitors, generating a tourism revenue of over 500 billion yuan. Booming tourism shapes the city’s image and public spaces, including visual and linguistic presentations within these spaces.

Rapid urbanisation aligns with substantial ethnic diversity in Chongqing. This municipality is home to all 55 ethnic minority groups, concentrated in the southwest area, where Tujia and Miao are the most prominent groups. The city’s unique demographic profile adds complexity to Chongqing’s sociolinguistic environment. While Mandarin is the official language in Chongqing, the presence and circulation of minority languages intersect with Mandarin-dominant public communication, reflecting a vibrant socio-cultural background and shaping the city’s broader language ecology.

This research took place with three rounds of data collection from late 2022 to late 2023. A notable time node is that the study coincided with the last phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in China from the end of 2022 to early 2023, a temporary but significant anchor for this research. During this global public health crisis, residents in Chongqing lived for over two years with a dramatically different lifestyle under strict epidemic control measures. Policies and measures altered how people interacted in public spheres and also the role and function of public places in activities such as communication, public management, and power relations.

As the central government removed Covid-19 restrictions at the end of 2022, this study was able to capture transitions of the post-Covid period and the return to the normal life. This distinctive timeline provides an additional analytical lens for the study to trace

the dynamic practices of signage under different social conditions, and supports a broader, deeper exploration of this megacity.

1.3 Key concepts/terms

This study draws on in-depth qualitative analyses incorporating frameworks of assemblage and geosemiotics to examine interactions among LL, semiotic resources, passengers, and spatial zones at Chongqing North High-Speed Railway Station, and frameworks of affective regimes and Bourdieusian notions of capital to explore how passengers' affective experiences are structured and how social functions emerge across online and offline LL in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport. This section will present definitions for key concepts and terms employed throughout the work.

(1) Linguistic landscape

The foundational definition of linguistic landscape can be traced to Landry and Bourhis (1997), who define it as “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (p.23). In this formulation, early LL research focuses on the presence of languages on signage in a public space to investigate issues such as multilingualism and language relations. Research has since moved beyond counting languages to investigating how signs are regulated and interpreted under specific context, and reflect ideologies, policies, identities, and power relations (e.g. Backhaus, 2006; Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2008). Contemporary scholarship further extends LL study to broader semiotic, ethnographic, and multimodal approaches, emphasising signage as one of the agents of meaning-making in a place and embedding commodification, globalisation, or cosmopolitanism in superdiverse contexts (e.g. Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Heller, 2010; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Blommaert, 2013).

In this study, LL refers to all publicly displayed signs in public transport places for passengers to read at a micro-analytical level, such as notices, advertisements, and

directional signs, in multiple semiotic forms including verbal text, graphic, or digitally mediated elements such as QR codes. However, this study is not limited to the examination of signage alone. Signage is seen as one of a number of key agents of place-making, the analysis of which can be and situated within a broader environment. The social meanings of signage are here interpreted in relation to social norms, historical and cultural background, and political context, as well as to the digital affordances that shape access to and understanding of spaces. On this basis, at a macro level, LL also refers to a research field, treated as an aggregated notion for understanding how meanings and places are produced through not only signage but the interplay of other resources. The central aim is to interpret the processes of meaning-making and place-making as they emerge through signage and its interactions with all the other social, material, or digital factors in the operation.

(2) Semiotic

Semiotics is the study of signs. It focuses on the production of meaning through multiple modes and resources, and is therefore considered useful for analysing communication (Beyer, 2026; Kusters et al., 2017). In LL research, Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) introduce the term “semiotic landscapes” to broaden LL analysis beyond written language on signs to include all forms of semiotic displays that make meaning in public places. This includes multimodal elements (e.g., images, sounds, smells) and other semiotic artefacts that carry social meaning in place (e.g., clothing, documents, tattoos). The concept has since been widely adopted in subsequent LL studies and debates. (e.g., Bloomaert, 2013; Moriarty, 2025; Pan, 2025; Pellanda, 2025; Pennycook, 2018).

The present study also takes up this concept and uses the term semiotic to refer to the full range of meaning-making resources encountered during data collection, such as images, logos, and QR codes are considered within this expanded LL tradition.

(3) Assemblage

The concept of assemblage is most often traced to Deleuze and Guattari's discussion in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). In their terms, an assemblage is a heterogeneous constellation in which human and non-human components are linked together in a contingent way. Relationships and interactions within an assemblage are shaped and reorganised through dynamic processes without fixed structures or boundaries.

Assemblage has been increasingly influential in LL research as it moves static, text-centred analyses toward more comprehensive and ongoing understandings of place-making by examining how semiotic resources and spatial arrangements come together to produce meanings. Subsequent LL scholarships resonate with this concept and its analytical concerns (e.g. Banda et al., 2024; Biró, 2022; Urribarrí, 2024; Pennycook, 2017).

The present research adopts Pennycook's (2017) conceptualised theoretical framework of assemblage, which treats linguistic resources in public space as a part of the broader semiotic and material configuration in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station. In analysis and discussion, a sign becomes a node within the network including its emplacement, producer, reader, and local histories, institutional regulations, cultural or economic background. The meaning and function carried by signage emerges through interactions and movements in the network.

(4) Affect

In sociolinguistic research, affect is commonly used to refer to what is felt, including dimensions of how moods or intensities are experienced and become socially meaningful (Raudaskoski & Klemmensen, 2019; Pratt, 2023). A key distinction within contemporary affect theory is affect versus feeling and emotion. While feeling always refers to a spontaneous private psychological phenomenon, affect is understood as publicly visible and interpretable through patterned forms of interactions, such as prosody, language, pacing. Affect describes the collective feelings attached to groups, places, or signs, rather than individual (Besnier, 1990; Ahmed, 2004; Wee, 2025).

Though affect overlaps with emotion to some extent, Massumi (2002) argues that emotions are linguistically labelled, while affect encompasses pre-reflective or emergent sensations accompanying social interactions which may not always be captured by clearly named emotions. The orientation of the present work builds on research in linguistic anthropology, which has long argued that affect can be studied empirically because it is culturally and socially organised practices enacted through communication.

The perspective of viewing affect as interactional and practice-oriented makes it recognisable in research. Whetherell's (2012) influential "affective practice" theory proposes that affects are simultaneously embodied and discursive. Affective practice theory suggests that affects can be analysed through observable interactional evidence such as stance-taking and narrative evaluation, instead of accessing personal internal states. Building on this interactional account, Wee and Goh (2019) propose the framework of "affective regimes" to examine how affects are patterned and regulated as expected and legitimised "regimes" through sociopolitical organisation. Garvin (2024) further reviews relevant LL studies on affect and demonstrates how broader discourses of affect shape the fluid processes of interpretation and meaning-making.

In alignment with the existing definition and discussion, this study aims to employ the concept of affective regimes to examine affect as a form of socially organised collective emotion, for example, nostalgia and romance, which are generated through interactional practices among people, places, and semiotic resources in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport.

(5) Geosemiotics

To support a solid analysis underpinned by the aforementioned key concepts of LL, assemblage, and affect, this study draws on Scollon and Scollon's (2003) framework of geosemiotics. Geosemiotics is an approach to "discourses in place". Geosemiotics can be applied to understand how public signage makes meaning through material

positioning and situated practices in the built environment. This model comprises three interlocking dimensions: interaction order, visual semiotics, and place semiotics. This triadic framework has been widely adopted in LL research because it provides an explicit micro-level analysis of a sign's semiotic form, spatial positioning, and social action (e.g. Jocuns, 2021; Alhaider, 2023; Kim, 2024).

A further contribution to geosemiotics is the notion of indexicality, which refers to the way signs point to or indicate meanings embedded in social relations, orders, or norms. Indexicality links the close observation of signage to the reproduction of social meanings such as legitimacy, marginality, inclusivity, and hierarchy. In this study, geosemiotics serves as the key analytical framework for exploring assemblage and affective regimes. A more detailed account of this framework will be provided in the following chapter.

(6) Capital

In this study, "capital" is used in the Bourdieusian sense to denote accumulated resources and capacities that can be mobilised to secure advantages within society. Capital can take multiple forms, the most common of which are economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. Forms of capital can be interrelated and/or transferable (Bourdieu, 1986; Joy et al., 2020). Economic capital refers to material and financial resources. Social capital concerns access to resources through social networks and relationships. Cultural capital includes valued competencies and resources that are recognised within institutions. Symbolic capital refers to the recognised legitimacy of other forms of capital which often crystallise in socially acknowledged markers such as titles, prestige, and status. Framed this way, capital is central to explaining how social resources are accumulated and converted, and how social hierarchies are reproduced over time.

This research examines the notion of capital through its interplay with affect in the Chongqing International Airport. It focuses on how patterned affective regimes

facilitate and enhance the accumulation of different forms of capitals (i.e., economic, social, cultural, symbolic), and in turn, how capitals legitimise regulated affective displays.

1.4 Aim and significance of this study

This study offers a comprehensive and thorough investigation of LL in Chongqing's major public transport hubs through applying a mixed-methods approach. At the macro-level, this study aims to gain an overview of the LL by classifying all collected photographic data and presenting detailed numeric results. At the micro-level, this study aims to interpret the role of signage as a functional agency in constructing and making meanings in a public space.

Accordingly, fourteen public transport hubs across six types of transport modes in Chongqing are examined a quantitative distributional analysis of the full dataset in the first stage. The second stage provides in-depth qualitative case studies of two strategically selected large-scale transport hubs. This decision was made because the dataset includes substantial variation in transport modes, station sizes, passenger groups, and local contexts, which made it difficult to apply a consistent set of analytical variables across all sites. As a result, analysing isolated photographic examples from each station could have led to fragmented or anecdotal findings. By focusing on two large-scale and data-rich stations, the study enabled a more detailed and coherent qualitative analysis within a relatively controlled framework. The aim was not to claim exhaustive representativeness, but to generate analytically robust findings from cases that were comparatively representative of the wider dataset.

To understand LL's practice in the formation of social functions, this study conceptualises Chongqing North High-speed Railway station as a large-scale assemblage, divides the station into different functional zones and investigates the interactions among signage, people, space, and other semiotic resources closely. To

understand how signage enriches symbolic meanings and shapes readers' experience, this study investigates the online and offline semiotic construction of Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport through exploring the role of signage in generating interactional and emotional responses in public as a strong factor of affective regimes. The scale and functional complexity of two selected hubs allow for a more sustained analysis of how linguistic and semiotic resources operate within transport spaces.

The following three research questions guide the study:

1. What types of information are conveyed through the linguistic landscape of transport hubs in Chongqing, and what features or changes within transport hubs can be identified?
2. How does signage in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station contribute to the construction, organisation, and differentiation of social functions within a multifunctional large-scale railway hub?
3. What affective regimes are mobilised through the linguistic landscape of the Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, and what forms of capital (e.g. symbolic, cultural, economic) are invoked and negotiated in the semiotic construction of an international transport hub?

This study extends LL research's theoretical and methodological repertoires in several ways. Theoretically, this study demonstrates how multiple lenses can be productively combined. It integrates a quantitative overview with a multilayered qualitative framework, providing a thorough LL investigation of Chongqing's public transport hubs which considers general patterns as well as nuanced and specific interpretations. Methodologically, this study demonstrates systematic handling and a scalable strategy for classifying a large dataset. The modified taxonomy provides a practical way of organising photographic data through layered criteria and structuring for cross-site comparison and closer analysis. Also, this study highlights the importance of

incorporating online LL data in the analysis of a physical site. This perspective extends the notion of affective regimes through integrating digital affordances into understanding place-making in a coherent manner.

Finally, this study provides an extensive dataset and empirical results which contribute to LL research in China and in transport hubs. It enriches the local corpora of Chongqing to support further sociolinguistic work and enables a comprehensive knowledge of this megacity in southwest China in relation to its language policy, public management, and urbanisation. It also enhances understanding transport hubs as a distinctive type of public space through demonstrating how signage, semiotic resources, spatial design, and everyday practices jointly shape meanings and social environments.

1.5 Thesis structure

The next two chapters provide a comprehensive literature review which situates this research within established LL scholarship and clarifies how the present study might extend existing work. Chapter 2 critically reviews empirical studies across widely examined topics (e.g. multilingualism, identity construction, and place-making), and studies with similar research settings in China or in transport hubs. This chapter draws on insights and contributions from these studies while also paying attention to their limitations. Two research gaps are foregrounded: systematic LL research on urban public transport networks remains under-developed, and current LL research in China often prioritises quantitative description over in-depth theoretically driven qualitative interpretation.

Chapter 3 traces the theoretical development of LL research from foundational studies to more recent directions. It also presents significant theoretical frameworks which shift or broaden the research field; moving from “space” to “place” and from written language to semiotics and multimodality.

Chapter 4 outlines the study's mixed-methods methodology. It begins with the research questions and then explains the conceptual framework that organises and operationalises this framework. An accompanying analytical framework specifies how each question is examined in detail. This chapter also details the overall research design, including research sites, researcher positionality and reflexivity, data collection, data management, and supplementary resources.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 constitute the analytical core of this study. Chapter 5 is a report on the quantitative analysis, providing an overall picture of LL in Chongqing's public transport hubs. Through developing an original three-dimensional taxonomy, this study categorises photographic data by three criteria: functions and contents, languages, and formats. The dataset consists of 1,852 photographs collected across six types of transport means, in total 14 hubs. Detailed numeric findings display the distribution of signs by different criteria across sites. Overall, the quantitative results provide a broad overview of the LL in Chongqing's transport hubs in preparation for the more comprehensive discussions of the following chapter.

Chapter 6 and 7 provides focused case study of two multi-functional large-scale transport hubs. Chapter 6 focuses on how the LL participates in forming, expanding, or transforming the social functions of Chongqing North High-Speed Railway Station. Drawing on Pennycook's (2017) concept of assemblage, which highlights interplays among space, people, linguistic resources, and other semiotic resources, this chapter conceptualises the station as a large-scale public assemblage organised into six functional zones. Through adopting an ethnographic methodology and taking the researcher's perspective and experience as an analytical lense, it systematically examines interactions within each zone and interprets the role of the LL in practices. This chapter argues that relationships within the assemblage are dynamic and continually reconfigured by sophisticated forces such as shifting social discourses, policies, and surveillance practices.

Chapter 7 investigates how the LL shapes passengers' affective experiences at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport (CKG). Building on Wee and Goh's (2019) framework of affective regimes, this chapter integrates both physical signs and online LL to identify major affective patterns within CKG. It also interprets how these affective regimes operate in generating expected affective responses across offline and online spaces, thereby addressing digital affordances as discussed in LL research. This chapter further discusses that affective regimes as manageable public resources through engaging with Bourdieusian theory of capital to highlight how affects strategically enhance different forms of capitals in public spheres.

Chapter 8 integrates this study's findings and analyses and brings the project to a close. It starts with structuring answers to the three research questions through organising key findings and drawing on necessary examples from earlier analyses. It then discusses the contributions this research makes to LL research across several dimensions, such as perspectives on multilingualism and language policy, and the extension of existing theoretical frameworks. Lastly, this chapter addresses implications and limitations of this project to be considered in future and concludes with a summary.

Chapter 2

LL Studies and the Present Study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews prior empirical LL studies that share similar research focus and geographic context of the present project and examines how this scholarship has shaped and advances the field. It begins with an overview of foundational substantive LL research, then traces the development and elaboration of themes central to the present study, including multilingualism, policy, identity construction, and place-making. Finally, it critically assesses LL studies situated in contexts comparable to this project, China and transport hubs, highlighting their contributions and limitations in order to identify existing research gaps.

2.2 Foundational LL studies

Early empirical LL research predominantly focused on quantifying types of signage and mapping the visibility of languages in the context of multilingualism. Spolsky and Cooper's (1991) *The Languages of Jerusalem* is often seen as one of the earliest full-scale LL studies which treats signage as sociolinguistic data. By carrying out systematic observation in Jerusalem's old city and surrounding commercial areas, Spolsky and Cooper pay special attention to the visibility of Hebrew, Arabic, English, and other languages on signs as a reflection of social relationships and hierarchies. They then introduce a "three conditions" model as an analytical framework for analysing language

choice on signage: (1) the sign-writer's skill in a given language, (2) the sign writer's assumptions about the intended readers, (3) the symbolic value attached to a given language. These rules offer a fundamental lens for examining signs not just as written codes convey information, but as symbolic and indexical elements. In addition, Spolsky and Cooper develop a taxonomy to provide clear criteria for classifying signs into the following types:

- (1) street signs
- (2) advertising signs
- (3) warning notices and prohibitions
- (4) building names
- (5) informative signs
- (6) commemorative plaques
- (7) label on objects
- (8) graffiti

This taxonomy has been widely discussed by subsequent studies (e.g., Noviana & Indah, 2025; Ou, 2023; Yoel, 2020), including the present study, in which the taxonomy is adapted to support quantitative analysis in Chongqing's transport hubs. In later discussion, Spolsky (2008) further enhances the significance of the old city study by connecting multilingual signs with the theory of language policy in a wider context.

Another significant foundational study in LL research is Landry and Bourhis' (1997) work on Francophone signage and perceived language vitality conducted via questionnaires in multiple Francophone communities in Canada. A central contribution of their work is making distinctions between what is written on a sign and what is signalled by a sign. Through recruiting participants from majority and minority Francophone areas in Canada, this study allows comparison between different group contexts, relates countable signs to ethnolinguistic vitality and language practices. It

also suggests a carryover effect that LL not only reflects group identity, but can also shape language attitudes and behaviours.

Building on the foundational work of Spolsky and Cooper (1991) and Landry and Bourhis (1997), later studies extended the scope of substantive LL studies by focusing on more specific issues such as power relations and language policy. For instance, in his study of Tokyo, Backhaus (2006) investigates stations on the Yamanote loop line in the central area. This study sets up a systematic coding schema to distinguish “top-down” (institutional) signs and “bottom-up” (commercial or individual) signs, and monolingual signs and multilingual signs. Results from >10,000 signs show that 19.6% of collected signs are multilingual, indicating the presence of non-Japanese languages (mostly English) in Tokyo’s public environment is common. While Japanese is visible on almost every top-down sign with absolute dominant informative function, the presence of English always functions as a symbol of internationalisation. The findings reveal power relationships between languages, reflecting the status of Japanese as the institutional language of rulemaking, and of other languages as indices of global culture and identity. Backhaus’ (2006) focus on the visibility and visual hierarchy of languages on official and nonofficial signs displays how signage patterns differently depending on its producers, shedding light on understanding multilingualism, language policy and power relations in Tokyo.

Cenoz and Gorter (2006) examine language hierarchies in their comparative study in Donostia–San Sebastián in the Basque County, Spain, and Leeuwarden in Friesland, the Netherlands. From official signs and commercial signs on the main shopping streets, they analyse how people value and use the state language (Spanish and Dutch), the respective minor language (Basque and Frisian), and the international language (English) in their everyday life. The results show that both state languages remain dominant in visibility, but the minority languages diverge. While Basque has a high visibility and systematic presence on signage in Basque County, Frisian appears

marginally in Leeuwarden, suggesting a more robust regional language policy and local uptake in Spain. However, English is more visible on Leeuwarden's public signs, indicating the effects of internationalisation and commercial orientation on language choices across sites.

Concentrating on counting and classifying languages on signs has confined the analysis of early LL studies to signage itself to some extent, therefore later work has shifted the focus and situated signs within wider social, political, and semiotic contexts. A key milestone in this expansion is Gorter and Shohamy's (2008) edited volume, which brings together 20 chapters organised into five thematic sections: theoretical perspectives, methodological issues, language policy, identity and awareness, and extensions of the field. Across these sections, the volume broadens both the sites and the questions of LL research. Empirical studies move beyond streets to include settings such as laboratories, classrooms, and tourist spaces. At the same time, analysis extends beyond documenting the visibility of languages to examining how does signage construct identities, participate in linguistic ecologies, and index governance and power. In this view, the linguistic landscape can function as a policy instrument, a pedagogical resource, and a contested symbol.

Methodologically, the collection also marks a shift away from purely quantitative sign counts by introducing and legitimising qualitative approaches, including multimodal analysis that attends to images, typography, layout, and material design alongside written language. By integrating these theoretical and methodological developments, Shohamy and Gorter's volume helped consolidate LL as an interdisciplinary field and remains a core reference for later research that develops these thematic strands in more depth.

Blommaert and Maly (2014) further argue that most early LL studies did not explain well the role of signage as a reflective actor of social change. They introduce a framework of Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA) as an approach to

relate signs to social relationships in superdiverse neighbourhoods. They propose that public space is a normative field: “public spaces are social arenas - circumscriptions on which control, discipline, belonging and membership operate and in which they are being played out” (p.3). Within this approach, signage is an instrument of power, and analysing LL thus helps in understanding public semiotic regimes. Methodologically, each sign can be analysed by three temporal “axes”: “the past axis” indexes the authorship and conditions of production, “the present axis” indexes the emplacement and interactions within the surrounding environment, and “the future axis” indexes the intended audiences and preferred actions. Looking at the three axes allows an historical tracing of complex social changes such as inequality and visibility behind signs.

While ELLA has been widely taken up in context-oriented LL research, several scholars also flag its limitations. Hinrichs (2015), for example, expresses concerns that ELLA under-uses speech data and lacks detailed structural analysis from a variationist sociolinguistic view. While adopting this ethnographic approach in the study of Southern Peru, Smith (2016) further reframes ELLA as “more landscape, less language” by highlighting the analytical focus on how signs intersect with infrastructure and interact with local moral discourses. In later reflection, Blommaert (2016) acknowledges that ELLA’s overt emphasis on qualitative and situated analysis raises methodological challenges regarding the scale of studies and comparability of findings across sites.

Moreover, noticing the growth of online environments, Maly and Blommaert (2019) considers the practical limitation of their initial ELLA paradigm and expand the discussion to an “offline-online” nexus. Their amended framework is referred to as ELLA 2.0. ELLA 2.0 explores how signage constructs place and meaning by considering both offline emplacement and online practices observed by involving screen-based data (screenshots, posts, comments, videos). The goal of ELLA 2.0 is to extend ethnographic LL research “as part of a (online/offline) network of texts,

mediated practices, artefacts, experiences and semiotics” (p.19). This orientation aligns with Canagarajah’s concept of the postdigital, which challenges the analytical division between online and offline domains, and understands contemporary communication as shaped by the interconnections among digital technologies, embodied practices, material artefacts, spatial arrangements, and socio-historical factors (Wang & Canagarajah, 2024). Signs can thus be understood as meanings produced as moving across hybrid semiotic environments. ELLA 2.0 therefore marks a conceptual shift from treating signs as bounded, site-specific objects to understanding them as mobile semiotic resources which circulate across platforms, and which are integral to contemporary place-making.

In sum, early LL studies established the field by clarifying incidental text on public signage as socially meaningful evidence and reclassifying them into a valid sociolinguistic corpus. These studies discussed the basic components of why visibility matters, linking the presence, absence, and placement of languages to questions of status, legitimacy, and intergroup relations. They also considered signage as emplaced, designed, and materially mediated semiotic action. At the same time, early policy-oriented accounts emphasised that language choice on signs is rarely random. This framing shifted LL research from simple description toward explanation, positioning public signage as a practical site where ideology and policy become observable.

Methodologically, the studies presented here have contributed to developing LL into a coherent research field. They demonstrate how to classify and differentiate institutional (“top-down”) from commercial or individual (“bottom-up”) signage, and use spatial variation to interpret multilingualism, language contact, and social change. Across settings, these studies made visible the extent to which public signage participates in producing public place. In combination, the pioneering literature established LL as both a systematic approach and a critical framework for understanding how public space is organised, negotiated, and valued through signage display.

2.3 LL studies by topics

2.3.1 LL studies on multilingualism

One of the key observations on public signage discussed in LL research is multilingualism within the context of globalisation. The signs collected from Chongqing's major public transport hubs in the present study also reflect the city's ongoing development toward a multilingual and international urban identity. Decades ago, Huebner (2006) observed the phenomenon of code-mixing on signage in 15 Bangkok neighbourhoods, noting that globalisation and language diversity are changing communal communications. A central concern with multilingual signs is the commodification of languages. For instance, there has been much research on public perceptions of signage among Basque speakers in Spain. Aiestaran et al., (2010) examine local inhabitants' language awareness through interviewing Basque L1 and Spanish L1 speakers' perception of multilingual signs in Donostia–San Sebastián, where Spanish is the dominant language and Basque is the minority language. The result indicate that most inhabitants prefer at-least bilingual signs (Spanish and Basque) while recognising and accepting the visibility of English, showing a supportive attitude to a globalised cityscape. Another takeaway of Aiestaran et al. (2010) is that Basque-speaking respondents show a greater willingness to pay for having the public signage in their preferred way than Spanish-speaking respondents who do not speak Basque, transferring the symbolic value of a minor language into non-market value through the speakers' commitment to sustain it in the cityscape.

Similarly, Onofri et al., (2010) conducted a study in Donostia–San Sebastián and Leeuwarden to testify the actual economic value of multilingual signs through applying contingent valuation. However, the results contrast with previous findings in that even though most respondents stated they support in sustaining a minor language on signage, more than half of them appear to become fare evaders when asked to pay individually for it, showing a gap between symbolic support and real commitment. This study

reveals the symbolic function of multilingual signage as a public good with economic value, but in a modest and limited way.

Among discussions of language commodification on signs, English has the most prominent role as a marketable resource. The visibility of English is high in brand names and logos in non-English speaking countries, including a wide range of products and services: boutiques, restaurants, sports, beauty, technology, finance, and so on. According to works on language commodification (e.g. Heller, 2003; Leeman & Modan, 2009), English fulfills economic value mainly through its symbolic function of indexing modernity, luxury and cosmopolitanism. In urban commercial centres such as Suzhou, China and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, scholars have produced similar findings, noting that English is used on shopfronts and in advertisements as a symbol of being modern and international (e.g. Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014; Li, 2015). In Shang and Zhou's (2022) and Han and Shang's (2024), organised interviews with business owners in Eastern China, in which most respondents invest signs including English with an expectation to yield return in prestige and association with global consumer culture, but few of them value the literal function of English. In similar studies, most Chinese business owners tend to believe that introducing English into the sign can add value to a commodity, saying they choose English because it "attracts rich customers" (Liu & Ma, 2024; Wang & Gao, 2025).

Yusra et al. (2023)'s analysis of multilingual commercial LL in Lombok Island, Indonesia shows that shop names often mobilise English and "English-like" forms as marketable resources. Rather than serving mainly informational purposes, these linguistic choices carry symbolic and economic value, projecting modernity, quality, cosmopolitan orientation, and consumer attractiveness. The study further demonstrates that commodification does not depend on standard English, but on partial borrowings, inventive spellings, and pseudo-English expressions which function effectively as branding devices that help businesses stand out. By situating these practices in a tourist

island context, this study strengthens LL accounts of neoliberal semiotics, illustrating how English operates as linguistic capital that reshapes local visual space and sustains language hierarchies in everyday commerce.

The presence of English on signs also holds symbolic value separate from economic concerns. Recently, Csapó-Horváth and Makkos (2025) explore how the signage of a Hungarian university has changed as the institution pursues internationalisation. Based on an empirical mapping of campus signs, it looks at the presence, emplacement, and visual prioritisation of languages, with particular attention to the expanding use of English alongside Hungarian. The analysis suggests that English is most prominent in institutionally produced, official signage that targets international audiences and signals a globally oriented university image, whereas Hungarian continues to prevail in signs aimed at local users and in more informal settings. Overall, the paper argues that the campus linguistic landscape operates as a material expression of language policy and institutional ideology, showing how “going international” is enacted through everyday semiotic arrangements in space.

LL research has also identified substantial evidence of language commodification at touristic sites, where local languages are strategically deployed to index localness and construct a sense of authenticity. Leeman and Modan’s (2009) study in Washington DC’s newly gentrified Chinatown reveals that Chinese characters appear on most non-Chinese chain stores’ shopfronts as a symbolic indicator to help sell the “authentic Chinatown experience”, even though the real Chinese speaking population is reducing in this community and most customers are non-Chinese. Similar findings are presented in Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau’s (2015) investigation of Catalan on signage in Mallorca, and Nie and Yao’s (2024) investigation of the visibility of the Dongba script in Lijiang. These studies explicitly interpret the commodification of a local or minor language on signage for the purposes of the tourism market and place-branding contexts.

Nambu (2025) investigates how multilingual signage is used at prominent heritage religious sites in Japan that attract international tourists, comparing language practices at Kiyomizu-dera, Tōdaiji, and Ise Shrine from a “religionscape” perspective. The analysis highlights clear differences across sites: Shinto shrine space is predominantly Japanese-only, consistent with institutional authority and national-ideological positioning, while Buddhist temple space shows greater multilingual accommodation aligned with tourism demands. The study also finds that multilingual messaging is concentrated in regulatory and prohibitive notices and that nearby commercial areas frequently use English and other languages not only for foreign visitors but also symbolically as a marketing device aimed at Japanese audiences.

Multilingual signage in school settings has also drawn much attention, in which LL is framed as a strategic resource, with a focus on how multilingual displays shape physical space and personal experiences. For instance, Cabiles (2025) treats schools as a key site where multilingualism is publicly negotiated and institutionally legitimised in the study of Melbourne. Building on Fiorentino and Fruttaldo’s (2021) idea of “linguaging the cityscapes,” urban spaces can be understood as linguistic arenas where meanings are continually negotiated and (re)mediated, Cabiles (2025) reproduces the concept of “linguaging the schoolscapes” to capture “everyday multilingualism” experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Cabiles (2025) further argues schoolscapes as policy enacted in everyday practice: they can legitimise linguistic diversity and support inclusion, yet they may also reinforce inequality by elevating certain “acceptable” languages while relegating others to tokenistic or symbolic functions.

Similarly, Liu and Dressler (2025) analyse how the outward-facing texts of schools, such as posters, notices, and signage on fences and building exteriors, shape the LL of nearby multilingual neighbourhoods in Calgary, Alberta during COVID-19 closures. They treat schoolscapes as public-facing semiotic actors, proposing that exterior schoolscapes can project institutional language priorities into surrounding multilingual

public space, operate in regulating behaviours and communicating messages even when campuses are closed. Schvarcz and Warren (2025) argue that multilingual schoolscapes can be created even in English language teaching settings shaped by English-only or otherwise restrictive language policies. Based on classroom cases from Israel and the United States, they illustrate how teachers intentionally reshape the classroom's visual and semiotic environment to make students' linguistic repertoires visible and usable. They contend that such practices can both unsettle monolingual expectations and foster more equitable forms of engagement and learning.

In addition to these most widely discussed focal topics, research on multilingual signage has also expanded to explore other directions. For example, Hong (2020) matches multilingual LL research with technology in Seoul. His study shows how street-level imagery (e.g., Google Street View) can be leveraged to analyse linguistic landscapes at scale by identifying and mapping languages on public signage across urban areas. It argues that patterns of multilingual display captured in these images correspond with broader socio-demographic and economic geographies, demonstrating the value of computational, spatial approaches for extending linguistic landscape research beyond localised case studies.

Following existing multilingualism-focused LL research, the present study examines not only the visibility of languages on signs through a quantitative lens, but also carefully discusses the dynamic functions of language at specific sites within both internationalised and localised contexts, and connects the observation to the discussion of other issues such as language policy and affective regimes. In doing so, it develops a more comprehensive understanding of multilingualism in a city's public transport system.

2.3.2 LL studies on policy

Early foundational linguistic landscape research identified signage as an institutional instrument by distinguishing government-produced, or “top-down,” signs (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Backhaus, 2006). Building on this line of work, the present study emphasises not only signage as a medium through which policy is represented, but also public transport hubs as authoritative places where policy is operationalised. This analysis is developed from two perspectives: language policy, and public management with a particular emphasis on the COVID-19 context.

LL studies on language policy

Subsequent empirical studies have developed the view of conceptualising signage as an implementation mechanism to enhance language policy. For example, Dal Negro (2008) demonstrates how authorities regulate the display and order of language on signs in line with local language policy, and how signage in turn mirrors the community’s linguistic repertoire in the context of Italy. Motschenbacher’s (2024) Norwegian case study shows how signage can serve as a practical check on whether a university’s stated language policy is actually realised on campus and argues that everyday signage practices can undermine or dilute policy goals, making the LL a useful lens for assessing policy implementation and its ideological effects. Under the Høgskulen på Vestlandet (HVL, a higher education institution) context, this study compares the institution’s official language guidelines with the languages and hierarchies on signage in one HVL campus. The analysis points to a notable disconnect: although the policy promotes a regional and international profile through parallel use of Nynorsk and English, the campus landscape, especially in bottom-up signs, more often reflects national-level norms, with Bokmål frequently taking precedence. Even in top-down signage, Nynorsk–English bilingual displays appear uncommon, Nynorsk is regularly rivalled by Bokmål, and English tends to be limited and visually subordinated.

As Gorter and Cenoz (2025) note, “regulating languages on public signs is part of language policies around the world” (p. 224). In more recent work, Cai (2025) conducts

a study on examining ways languages are displayed on signs in alignment with the nationwide language policies in Australia, demonstrates that multilingual signage is utilised as a politically sensitive instrument for managing cultural diversity and social inclusion in Australia, especially when it comes to indigenous languages

A parallel strand of LL studies recognises the role of signage in public regulation and governance. Svennevig (2021) explains how the multimodal design of public signs such as “no smoking” signs are calibrated to manage politeness and compliance in public areas. Research on mega events such as EXPO 2020 Dubai reveals that informational signs are designed and displayed centrally to control passenger flow and ensure safety in implementing multilingual access (Fadhillah & Triwinarti, 2023). Huang and Zhao (2025) argue that adherence to language policy is not simply a matter of following rules or breaking them, but often falls along a spectrum of partial alignment. Focusing on the restaurant shop signs in Chengdu, they trace how sign producers balance regulatory expectations for standard public written language with commercial branding goals and the desire to signal local Chengdu identity. This study establishes a graded account of compliance, demonstrating that signs may conform to official norms in certain features while simultaneously incorporating localising elements through selective deviations, stylisation, or locally marked word choices. Overall, it argues that everyday commercial signage is a key arena where language policy is interpreted in practice and where ideologies of standardness interact with local identity making.

In this study, observations of language policy in Chongqing and China are distributed across different analytical chapters. From multiple perspectives such as visual design, placement, and interactional practice, the analysis demonstrates how policy messages are presented and experienced in public transport spaces.

LL studies on COVID-19

Besides language policy, signage also functions as an important tool for implementing other forms of governance-related policy, including public safety (Uekusa &

Matthewman, 2023), transportation management (Ayyub & Rohmah, 2024), and civic education (Cunningham & King, 2021). Among these, the COVID-19 pandemic stands out as a particularly significant context by generating substantial LL research and strongly advancing LL scholarship on the role of signage in the enactment of public management policy. The present study also encountered COVID-19 signs during the first data collections in 2022 and the second in 2023, which provide a dense and nuanced context for looking at public regulation and health crisis management in Chongqing. In general, the pandemic reshaped how linguistic and semiotic landscapes relate to broader social dynamics by generating new social norms, reworking interpersonal and institutional relationships, and rearticulating community identities.

As a tool of pandemic communication, COVID-19 signs are expected to “maximise the public’s capacity to act as an effective partner by encouraging prevention, promoting containment, and fostering resilience and recovery” (Vaughan & Tinker, 2009, p. S324). They are installed in various places to indicate both risks and precautions, for instance, providing guidance to the public on how to adapt to wearing a mask, frequent hand washing, and social distancing. The significance and effectiveness of COVID-19 signs has been examined in many studies (e.g. Comer, 2022; Jiang et al., 2024; Kananaj & Rushiti, 2024; Liu & Dressler, 2025). Moreover, COVID-19 signs are seen as one of the main performers in changing how we perceive and use public space (Kalocsányiová et al., 2021).

Many scholars, working across different countries and contexts, have pointed to shifts in power structures and social relations. Milak (2022) examines mask-related signage on Seoul’s buses and subways as a site where government and civil society negotiate public space. The posters deploy varied discursive strategies, e.g., appeals to emotion, fear-based messaging, and references to fines, and combine language with visual resources to encourage compliance and regulate behaviour. At the same time, everyday practices such as not wearing masks or wearing them improperly function as bottom-

up resistance, highlighting tensions between authority and personal liberty and underscoring the role of the linguistic landscape as a regulatory device.

Likewise, Phyak and Sharma (2022) discuss how COVID-19 signs and non-linguistic materials in Nepal, such as metal rods and ropes, were used in recreating boundaries of spaces and people, potentially marginalising certain social groups. Zhao (2025) explores how Chinese students in the UK constructed a sense of diasporic community online during COVID-19. Using diaries and interviews, it shows how students both interpreted and actively shaped a shared digital semiotic landscape, which helped to re-create “local” space virtually and sustain cultural identities and mutual support under pandemic constraints. More specifically, Androutsopoulos (2022) displays shifting power, policy, and social relationships through comparing mask-requirement signs in Hamburg during two pandemic waves. He argues that such shifts gave COVID-19 signs a spatiotemporal validity, “the current lift of public restrictions in some countries is directly translated in a downscaling and eventual demise of regulatory signs” (p.145).

Some scholars further propose that there is an increasing tension between the government and civics. The unequal message distribution at deprived areas and less deprived areas also lead to conflicts. Strange (2022) explains how COVID-19 signs are designed and displayed by the UK government to individualise responsibility for the pandemic. Kalocsányiová et al. (2021) compares COVID-19 signs from different areas in the UK and notices inequality in the access to COVID-19. Contents on COVID-19 signs in economically disadvantaged areas are less comprehensive, guidance is limited or even missing. Zhang (2026) treats COVID-19 signage in China as a form of linguistic landscape that goes beyond conveying public-health guidance. Drawing on nexus analysis, he argues that these signs operate as mediational resources that help organise collective action, showing how signage links policy directives, institutional procedures, and everyday routines, and how verbal and visual design choices work together to coordinate compliance and shape public conduct. The study positions pandemic

signage within a wider nexus of governance and participation, suggesting that linguistic landscape resources can mobilise communities, routinise specific understandings of responsibility, and make coordinated action feasible in everyday settings.

The pandemic also reshaped interpersonal interactions and social relationships in specific public settings, a pattern that is evident at Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station in this study. Prior research reports similar shifts in other contexts. Modan and Wells (2022), for instance, show that signage on businesses in Washington, D.C. such as closure notices and masking and distancing requirements, made workers' conditions more publicly visible and brought related issues (e.g., unemployment insurance, strikes, and sick leave) to the fore. They argue that these semiotic messages reconfigured the relationship among labour, public health, and communal responsibility, thereby opening a space of "political possibility" (p. 281). Along similar lines, Feyaerts and Heyvaert (2021) identify a new mode of business communication in Flanders at the intersection of linguistics and marketing. They find that shop posters shifted away from product promotion toward messages of empathy, concern, and solidarity. This "humanised," consumer-oriented strategy aimed to reinforce ties between businesses and customers and to ease pressure arising from declining offline sales.

In terms of multilingualism, COVID-19 signs are created as urgent measures in the context of the pandemic, with failure at delivering stated regulations to speakers of various languages being potentially dangerous (Chesnut, et al., 2023). At the same time, the presence of a particular language on signs can also be sensitive. For example, the 'do not spit' signs at New Zealand airport only featuring Chinese and Korean (Cunningham & King, 2020), and Arabic on signs regarding theft in Finland (Nishiyama, 2020) all imply negative connotations for certain communities. Chesnut et al., (2022) add that for those who do not speak these languages, noticing these signs might lead to overreading and prejudice against the targeted language users. Chesnut et al. criticise that the government offers languages on COVID-19 signs without

investigating readers' background and language needs carefully. For instance, Italian is shown on some signs while no participant speaks or understands it.

Nevertheless, appropriate multilingual COVID-19 signs can play a positive role in delivering information and expressing emotions. Bao (2021) collected COVID-19 signs from drugstores and convenient stores at transportation stations in Tokyo during the initial outbreak in early 2020. When there was a mask shortage, many shops post multilingual notifications to inform consumers of mask-buying rules. There were even signs in Chinese with '武汉加油'(Pray for Wuhan/Wuhan fighting) at shops and stations, building emotional connection with Chinese consumers and express affective support.

Another notable significance of COVID-19 signs was their function as an ideological strategy. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, Hong Kong has experienced a large-scale socio-political movement, which incited civil emotions and led to unrest. Under such context, LL became an intersection between politics and public health. With the government slogan 'united, we fight this virus', Theng et al. (2022) suggest that small businesses displayed their ideologies and political slants subtly in bottom-up signs: whether alignment, misalignment, or ambiguity. In this way, the tension and fight between camps, ideologies, and between the government and dissenters did not end even during lockdowns, messages and attitudes were still delivered through signs, mutely.

From a sociopolitical perspective, COVID-19 signs played a vital role in creating exclusionary discourses. Yao (2021a) emphasises the role of semiotic landscapes in evoking affective responses and thus leading to cooperative behaviours, such as hate and even violence under the Covid context. According to Yao (2021a), "exclusion" refers to the mutual relationship between the self and the other, or "us" and "them", based on the cognition of belonging to specific social categories. In the construction of

exclusionary discourses, such as stigmatisation and discrimination, multiple languages and discursive strategies are often applied (Erdogan-Ozturk & Isik-Guler, 2020).

As a case of illustration, Chan and Montt Strabucchi (2021) observed increasing anti-Chinese racism in Chile through multimodal semiotic resources from videos, memes, printed flyers, and running jokes on social medias. Expressions on collected resources were explicit, images such as the bat and inscriptions such as ‘it’s all your fault’, ‘go back to your country’, ‘Chinese virus’ in different languages depicted Chinese as dirty, untrustworthy, and unthinking people who should be blamed. Zhao’s (2021) research provides a contrary perspective from Chinese netizens by collecting their posts on Zhihu, the major Q&A platform in China. The results indicate that exclusionary discourses were also found in Chinese netizens’ daily discussions and “Liking” behaviour. Most Chinese netizens present a tough and confrontational stance when encountering external discriminations and provocations, and Zhao (2021) attributes it to the great achievements China has made in recent years. However, Chinese netizens also rationally point out the deficiencies of the Chinese government. This netizen approach resonates in several ways with Yang and Chen’s (2021) analysis of Chinese official discourse, which suggests that nationalism and globalism can coexist rather than compete. On the one hand, official messaging often foregrounds national belonging and assigns responsibility to “the West,” drawing a sharper line between “us” and “them.” On the other hand, the same discourse can pivot to a more inclusive “we,” emphasising solidarity and endorsing international cooperation.

In order to comply with anti-COVID regulations, new research methodologies developed within the field of LL research. Tufi (2022) and Comer (2022) both adopted the auto-ethnography approach, in which participants and interviewees provide multimodal data such as photos, documents, and narratives of their own experiences during the pandemic, and as a result, home becomes the key semiotic site. Tufi (2022) captures how these domestic landscapes reconfigure people’s time and space routines

in home spaces to accommodate lockdowns in the UK. Participants' photos and narratives indicate how conversations with family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues were affected, along with lifestyle and mental state. Comer (2022) examines 'affective discursive practices' in COVID-19 signs in Melbourne from his own perspective of himself as a Melbournian, interpreting messages of love, kindness, and resilience during several lockdown periods. He carefully describes how the experience of lockdown is articulated and felt and emphasises the feeling function of COVID-19 signs at play in forming citizen identity, community resilience, and hope under extreme circumstances. These studies add further weight to the now well-established insight of LL research: that the interpretation of language on signs relies much more heavily on their symbolising function than linguistic meaning.

In conclusion, COVID-19 signage provides a rich and convincing dataset for examining the role of the LL as an institutional strategy for managing and regulating public spaces, as these signs demonstrate how authorities utilise language, semiotic design, and spatial placement to communicate rules, regulate behaviours, and normalise new forms of governance during periods of crisis.

2.3.3 LL studies on identity and place-making

LL has been demonstrated to be a central actor to identity construction and place-making projects. In Shohamy and Gorter's (2008) book, an aggregation of articles provides thorough discussions across various sites. From this volume, Curtin's (2008) work in Taipei reveals the tensions between "Chinese" and "Taiwanese" identities through examining the co-presence of Chinese and non-Chinese characters on signs in Taipei urban spaces. Through looking at the competing Romanisation systems, Curtin demonstrates that language choices can be read as political stances which index the sensitive collective national identity phenomenon in Taiwan. Like Curtin, Trumper-Hecht's contribution (2008) highlights the role of LL as a medium for negotiating boundaries of belonging in a mixed Jewish-Arab town in Israel, where the presence of

Arabic on signs has become a point of contention. She argues that while sharing the public space, the selective inclusion or exclusion of Arabic on signs indexes competing claims to territory and identity.

In the same vein, Blackwood and Tufi's (2015) analysis of Italian, Slovene and other languages in Trieste, Italy display a similar result that linguistic resources on signage in urban spaces index the historical ethnic tensions and signal different groups' competing narratives of belonging. Bhujel and Sinha (2025) explore how Nepali ethnic communities in West Bengal use public signs to manage and project collective identity in a multilingual, politically charged environment. Based on an empirical collection of signage from public and commercial settings, it examines language and script choices to how the presence of Nepali sometimes alongside, and sometimes in tension with, more dominant languages such as Bengali and English. The analysis suggests that the linguistic landscape is not simply a mirror of everyday speech but a practical resource through which community members signal belonging, seek recognition, and negotiate their position within wider structures of power and marginalisation.

Beyond constructing group identities, scholars have also examined how signage participates in place-making across different topics such as ethnic districts, contested places, and tourist sites. One popular topic in the discussions of urban ethnic neighbourhoods is the image of Chinatowns. Lou (2010) demonstrates in her ethnographic work in Washington DC's Chinatown how the textual, visual, and spatial arrangements of signage is central in constructing Chinatown as a revitalised and consumer-friendly space, rebranding the neighbourhood and justifying gentrification. She extended her study in 2016 through involving interviews, policy documents, and streetscapes, considering the changing power relations between planners and developers, residents and businesses, Amos' (2016) comparative work in Liverpool's Chinatown shows how the presence of Chinese characters on signage helps position

“Chinese” on the spatial margins of the city and construct symbolic boundaries around the ethnic community.

Similar findings have been attained in empirical studies focused on the making of tourist sites, with broad agreement on not only the informative function of signage in informing visitors, but its symbolic function of actively making tourist destinations a particular type of place. Tourism-oriented signage is treated as an indicator of authenticity and memorability. For instance, Kallen’s (2008) study of Irish shows that tourism turns public signage into a form of audience-oriented communication. He argues that tourist signs operate as purposeful tools, anticipating how visitors move, what they need, and how they are likely to interpret a place. This study demonstrates LL’s active role in shaping audiences’ experiences while also staging “authentic Irishness” through commodifying particular linguistic or cultural elements, and packaging local or national identity for consumption. Similarly, Wulandari and Rosidah (2021) find that the visibility of Javanese, Madurese, and Arab, the religious phrases and Islamic visual symbols on signs in Pasuruan city in Java, Indonesia) co-construct the distinctive icon as “Kota Santri”⁴ and suggest that the local government to plan signage as an effective city branding strategy.

Furthermore, Moriarty’s (2012) chapter shows how linguistic landscapes can become concrete sites of language-ideological dispute by focusing on a highly visible location in the Irish tourist town of Dingle: a main-street wall that became a platform for public messages linked to the “Dingle naming debate”. More specific, this chapter demonstrates how arguments over Irish-only versus bilingual naming are materialised and debated in everyday space, particularly within a tourism economy. The analysis demonstrates that small-scale, localised linguistic artifacts can expose wider struggles over power, policy, authenticity, and ownership of place. In doing so, the study contributes to LL research by emphasizing interpretive, multimodal, and discourse-

⁴ “City of pious people”, an epithet in Indonesia.

analytic approaches that conceptualise the landscape as a contested and ideologically charged construction of place.

Extending the analytical lens to a broader scale, Blackwood and Tufi (2015) explore how linguistic landscapes index macro-level ideological projects, thereby situating the understanding of local signage practices within wider political, economic, and institutional regimes of meaning-making. Their comparative work on French and Italian cities shows that language choices and the way they are presented on signage reflect ideological debates about inclusion vs. exclusion and tradition vs. modernity, and function as semiotic boundary markers indicating that city spaces are the intersection of tourism, nationalism, and regionalism. A multilayered and conflicting city image is also depicted in Chen's (2025) study in Beijing. Through employing an ethnographic approach, Chen treats the city as readable texts and identifies four discursive frames from LL in Beijing's hutong⁵ areas corresponding to four types of city images: a historical-cultural frame indexes the heritage life of "old Beijing", a globalisation frame indexes a contemporary "global metropolis", a political-discourse frame indicates the official voice in "institutionalised space", and an everyday-life frame indicates vernacular and "lived community". Chen shows how LL functions as a discursive instrument mediating meaning between people and spaces within the broader socio-political context of Beijing, continuously shaping and reshaping this polyphonic city.

Ambion's (2023) article investigates how multilingualism and language ideology are expressed in a setting shaped by commerce and tourism through a case study of the LL of Amadeo, Cavite, often branded as the Philippines' "coffee capital". Drawing on a photographic corpus of 83 public texts collected across 14 suburbs, the study classifies signs as mono/bi/multilingual and examines how languages are arranged and combined in shop signage, coffee packaging and labels, and landmark displays. Using Sebba's

⁵ A traditional narrow alleyway in Beijing that forms part of historic neighbourhoods.

(2013) framework for analysing language in space, and supported by basic frequency counts, the paper shows that English is especially prominent and is used not only to convey practical information, such as product details aimed at educated local buyers and visitors, but also to project symbolic meanings tied to modernity and international appeal. Overall, the study argues that the visibility of English reflects an ideology where economic and promotional goals strongly influence public language choices, often more than commitments to highlighting local or “indigenous” cultural identity.

To conclude, tourist signs has become a prominent focus in LL research because they are typically planned, audience-targeted, and tied to economic agendas. Across LL studies, they are commonly interpreted as useful semiotic tools which direct mobility and regulate behaviour, enhance authenticity and heritage, and commercialising place by matching language choices and visual design to branding strategies.

However, research on identity construction relies heavily on qualitative methods, aforementioned existing LL studies are often limited in scope, typically focusing on a single site or a relatively small dataset. To address this limitation, this study integrates the examination of Chongqing’s local identity construction and city branding across all three analytical chapters (Chapters 6–8), at two complementary levels: a large-scale survey covering six transport modes across 14 sites, and in-depth analyses of two focal sites.

2.3.4 LL studies on QR codes

Linguistic landscape research has shown a marked rise in attention to online spaces (e.g., Bruyèl-Olmedo, 2025; Eliniongoze Kimambo, 2025; McInerney, 2024). The unlimited capacity of digital environments and the fact that online content can circulate to countless readers has drawn growing empirical interest to virtual LL and the role of online semiotic resources (Biró, 2018). Within this line of work, QR codes have attracted particular interest as a distinctive bridge between offline and online spaces,

making the interface between the two a key site of analysis. Drawing on Gorter and Cenoz (2025), QR codes can be understood as a form of digital signage whose meaning is not directly readable from the physical sign itself. Unlike conventional written signs, QR codes require activation through a smartphone or scanning tool. Their linguistic and semiotic meaning therefore emerges through user interaction, linking physical public spaces with online information, services, and multilingual resources. Similarly, Purschke (2019) treats QR codes as devices that let physical signs point outward to online environments.

This perspective aligns with scholarship showing that meanings and identities are often produced through indexical connections that move across material signage and networked digital spaces (e.g., Blommaert & Maly, 2019), in which, Androutsopoulos' (2024) notion of the offline–online nexus is especially useful here because it highlights that these connections are not incidental; they are infrastructural and unfold over time as people encounter signs, scan codes, and follow the digital pathways that signage sets in motion.

Previous studies on QR codes in physical public spaces tend to function significantly in relation to governance and commodification. As discussed in Section 2.3.2, empirical linguistic landscape studies of COVID-19 signage repeatedly show that QR codes act as micro-level tools of governance, turning public-health instructions into concrete, executable routes for compliance. For instance, in Hong Kong, Gu (2022) documents QR codes from both top-down and bottom-up COVID-19 signs and demonstrates its role in anti-COVID battle as a medium delivering information, imperatives, and behavioural requirements.

Moreover, empirical LL studies in consumption-oriented spaces suggest that QR codes often sit at the intersection of commodification and audience design, helping signage “sell” place while presupposing particular user competencies and access. In the Badung Smart Heritage Market (Bali), Purnawati et al. (2024) show that QR codes function as

a “smart” infrastructural element and a flexible interactive component within a curated semiotic environment. In doing so, they support tourism competitiveness and market consumption by aligning heritage display with commercially oriented communication practices. Similarly, Santos Rovira’s (2025) study of Lisbon’s tourism/migration-reshaped neighbourhood documents an LL shaped by visitor economies, where signs may include QR codes providing access to further information, signalling how tourist-oriented communication increasingly extends into platform-mediated layers.

Moreover, recent studies have also paid close attention to how this form of semiotic resource reshapes the construction of actual physical space. For instance, Wirza et al. (2025) examine translanguaging in the rural tourism linguistic landscape of Alamendah, Indonesia, showing how multilingual and multimodal signs express cultural identity and support tourism development. The study identifies QR codes as semiotic resources embedded in public signs, particularly posters, where they connect traditional tourism spaces with contemporary digital practices and visitor interaction. Hillman (2025) explores the educationscape of a U.S. international branch campus in Qatar and notes that QR codes, alongside other visual and spatial signs, contribute to the construction of linguistic and semiotic landscapes in educational spaces. The study adopts a broader understanding of signage as multimodal semiotic resources that communicate identity, values, and spatial meanings beyond written language alone.

However, research also suggests that QR codes in public places come with a range of practical and ethical challenges. First, access to QR-based provision can be uneven because it often assumes that people have a smartphone, reliable internet connectivity, and the digital literacy needed to scan and navigate linked content, which can leave some users behind (Hu et al., 2024). For instance, in their study of heritage information boards in Surabaya, Java, Savitri et al. (2024) show that although QR codes are often presented as improving visitor access, communication barriers can persist precisely

because QR code information presupposes device ownership, stable connectivity, and the literacies required to engage with the digital layer.

Beyond access and usability issues, research also points to the privacy, security, and datafication risks that QR codes can bring into public places. People may hesitate to scan when it is unclear what data might be collected, who will access it, or what happens after the scan. Such concerns can undermine trust even when QR codes are presented as convenient tools (Hu et al., 2024; Shi & Wang, 2022). Geisler and Pöhn (2024) show that QR codes can function as phishing vectors in real-world contexts, including pandemic-themed scenarios that draw on institutional authority and routinised scanning habits. At the same time, while scholarship highlights how QR codes can become embedded in wider infrastructures of data collection and behavioural governance during COVID-19, it also raises concerns about secondary use and shifting boundaries around acceptable data access (Davies & Hjorth, 2023; Goggin, 2024).

2.4 LL studies in public transport hubs

The significance of public transportation to urban development and residents' daily life is well-supported. Ewing and Cervero's (2010) large meta-analysis frames transport as a core lever for urban sustainability and congestion management. Stanley and Stanley (2017) demonstrate that mobility and access to opportunities are key mechanisms by which transport affects social inclusion outcomes. Tao et al., (2022) argue that improved transit accessibility lowers spatial constraints on daily activities, reinforcing the argument that transportation systems critically shape residents' ability to access employment and essential services

A fundamental and widely known LL study of transport hubs is Backhaus (2006)'s study on the Yamanote Line in Tokyo, which examines distinctions between official and nonofficial signs. Empirical LL scholarship in public transport spaces has concentrated on several key settings, especially airports, railway stations, and metro

systems, because these spaces bring together intensive communication needs, strong institutional governance, and linguistically diverse users.

Airport-focused studies consistently describe a top-down semiotic regime in which the national language is positioned as the primary marker of authority, while English is favoured to ensure international readability. Woo and Nora Regit's (2022) small-scale study of Kuala Lumpur International Airport, for instance, adopts a mixed-methods design that combines 31 non-identical signs out of 368 multilingual signs, with questionnaire data from airport passengers. It analyses how languages are allocated on top-down signs across different categories and ranked through visual design choices such as placement, font size, and ordering. The questionnaire element complements the analysis of photographic data by gathering travellers' views on how readable and useful the signs are, as well as overall satisfaction with the multilingual system. This allows the study to move beyond describing which languages are most visible: it also shows how that visual hierarchy is experienced by users, and how language choice and layout together shape passengers' sense of how accessible the airport space is.

In Thailand, Ngampramuan's (2022) research at Suvarnabhumi International Airport likewise reports sustained dominance of Thai–English bilingualism, with other foreign languages appearing only occasionally despite shifts in visitor profiles. In Bali, Rastitiati's (2023) study investigates the linguistic landscape of I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport through photographic documentation and interviews with airport users. It identifies seven language arrangements on signs, including Indonesian, English, Indonesian–English, Balinese–English, and English–Chinese. Overall, participants tend to favour Indonesian–English bilingual signage for readability and convenience, while they also support the visibility of Balinese language and script as expressions of local identity. Additional foreign languages are generally welcomed when they clearly serve travellers' informational needs.

Railway-station studies portray stations as managed and rule-oriented spaces in which signage is designed to facilitate movement and regulation. Ayyub and Rohmah's (2024) study in Kotabaru Malang Train Station in Indonesia draw on a photographic dataset of 41 signs and applies qualitative analysis to explore language choices and functions. By examining signage across functions such as information, warning, and advertising, the study identifies repeated tendencies in which specific languages are assigned particular roles: the presence of English signals inclusivity and globalisation, Indonesian highlights community pride and local cultural heritage, while both languages contribute to communication efficiency and public management in transport space, indexing the significance of national language policy.

Lock (2003) collects 75 advertisements on the Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway. The findings reveal that English, Cantonese, and Mandarin Chinese carry different functions on trains but that all of these languages work together toward the station's daily operation: English is used to manifest globalisation in advertisement; Cantonese for localizing foreign products; and Mandarin for showcasing traditional culture.

Pipattarasakul (2025) analyses 314 signs at Bangkok's Hua Lamphong railway station to characterise the site's linguistic landscape. The study finds that Thai dominates informational and regulatory notices, while English most often functions as a supplementary code oriented to international travellers. This hierarchy is interpreted in relation to the station's institutional role as a major transport hub. Methodologically, the article also introduces a more systematic way to organise and interrogate linguistic landscape datasets through a Query by Example approach.

In contrast, De Los Reyes (2014)'s study of in two major train stations in the Philippines argues that despite the effort to bolster popularity of Filipino by issuing language policies, signs still indexed the valorisation of English among citizens. From this point of view, signs at transportation hubs can be seen to reflect the sometimes complicated historical, educational, and political background of a country.

Beyond rail systems, recent empirical attention has also extended to bus terminals and multi-site transport ecologies. Multi-site research by Putra et al. (2024) in Sidoarjo Regency, Indonesia advances this line of work by comparing signage across an airport, train stations, and bus stations, and by incorporating passenger interviews to relate sign design to users' interpretations. However, despite covering a relatively broad range of transport-site types, the study is based on only 94 signs and five interviews, which limits both the depth of analysis and the strength of its interpretations. It can be seen as a small-scale innovative attempt to examine multiple transport settings, but the scope of its dataset makes it difficult to draw broadly generalisable conclusions.

Across transport sites, existing empirical studies points to several shared patterns. First, transport LLs display a clear functional hierarchy: the dominant or local language carries the main informational and regulatory burden, while English is the most common auxiliary language for broader international comprehensibility. In limited contexts, other languages appear intermittently for narrower audiences. Second, transport signage is typically top-down and institution-led, which produces relatively standardised formats and predictable visual design. Third, although navigation is the primary aim of signage in transport spaces, its purpose often goes beyond basic information delivery to include governance and institutional messages, such as rules and warnings. In some cases, transport signage also indexes symbolic meanings such as inclusivity and identity. Methodologically, research in this area still relies mainly on photographic sign collection, while a smaller body of work addresses audience perceptions, and applies questionnaires and interviews to link language displays with usability and audience assessment.

However, compared with other commonly studied public settings such as commercial areas and schools, research on transport hubs remains relatively underdeveloped, and the limitations of this line of inquiry are therefore particularly apparent. First, most studies focus on a single site. As a result, both the research scope and the volume of

data are limited, thus discussion is often confined to one specific site, making it difficult to extend findings for generalisation or comparison. Second, existing studies tend to focus on the languages on signs and the communicative function of signs with a strong quantitative orientation. Less attention has been paid to other roles that signage may play in transport hubs, to its interaction with semiotic or material resources, and to understanding its contribution to place-making in these distinctive public spaces.

The present study aims to fill these identified research gaps from the following aspects. First, this study conducts a large-scale comprehensive investigation of six types of transport means, in total 14 transport hubs across a megacity. Second, this study has both an emphasis on the quantitative analysis as well as the qualitative lenses. It addresses the role signage plays in transport hubs through exploring its interactions with people, space, and other semiotic resources in situ in terms of meaning making and place making.

2.5 LL studies in Chinese context

LL research in China started relatively late, beginning only in the late 2000s. Looking back on the development of LL research in China allows us to scrutinise how this research field has been integrated into Chinese academia and society and comprehend the significance of language signs in shaping places and identities more profoundly. In this section, I will first provide an overview of the history of LL research in China by identifying three main development stages. Then, I will introduce contemporary emerging topics within recent studies.

2.5.1 An overview

As early as 1988, even earlier than Landry and Bourhis (1997)'s work first conceptualised linguistic landscapes as a field of research, there was at least one study within China which recognised the relationship between signage and social actions. Cai (1988) collected examples of mismatching road signs in Shanghai and called for unified

regulation by the government. However, Cai (1988) did not propose a systematic theory or interpret his ideas of the relationship between signs and society thoroughly, and the study did not receive much attention. There were no similar studies in China until the early 2000s, when English translation on signage began to draw scholars' attention (e.g., Nie, 2004; Tang & Tang, 2005; Wan et al., 2004).

Yang et al., (2007) develop the first study to introduce the notion of linguistic landscape into Chinese academia. Yang et al., (2007) translate 'landscape' as '风貌', which is closer to 'scenery', a translation not adopted by later research because it sounds unrelated to urban life. Xie's (2008) study is the first work to propose to examine the translation of signs from the perspective of language policy and sociolinguistics. Sun (2009)'s article is the first Chinese work to directly address 'linguistic landscape', and his translation '语言景观' (linguistic landscape) is still widely accepted. Even though there are only 11 articles on the topic on Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the primary online database of peer-reviewed journal article in China, during the period from 2007 to 2010 (as recorded by Wu et al., 2017), the deeper connotations of language on signs and the complex correlation with society began to emerge to be understood. The key features of the first stage are the struggles of situating this new field and exploring theories at a surface level.

From 2011 to 2014 there is a marked increase in the quantity of LL studies (e.g. Wu et al., 2017; Ye & Hu, 2021; Zhang, 2015). Wu et al. (2017) identify 20 articles with 'linguistic landscape' in the title during this period. While a number of studies were not titled with this term, their contents fall directly within the scope of linguistic landscape research. Ye and Hu (2021) conduct a similar search of the CNKI database using the terms 'public signs and 'translation' and found 268 articles in 2011 alone. The key foci of LL research in China during this time can thus be observed to be on the correctness of translation, with the scope of analysis confined to the literal meaning of signs.

While translation studies are already a mature discipline in China at this time, with more than 40 different theories circulating in the literature (Ye & Hu, 2021), the exploration of LL as a sub-field of sociolinguistics is still superficial and imbalanced. Several common problems and limitations among early LL studies in China can be summarised. The first is a tendency to describe rather than interpret. Research at this stage only count signs then describe and categorise them (e.g. Li, 2011; Sun & Gu, 2013). Few tries to analyse the meaning behind the signs or the reasons they were created. The second is the lack of LL theory in China. For example, there is no agreement on principles for coding and categorising signs, thus not allowing for comparison between the results of different studies.

In 2014 Shang and Zhao publish two articles containing thorough overviews of the discipline and in-depth discussion of its significance, systematically introducing leading foreign scholars and their theory, including Scollon & Scollon (2003), Huebner (2006), Ben-Rafael (2008), and Spolsky (2008). These two articles build up a solid foundation for later research and are still the most cited within the Chinese literature today. Since LL was already a mature research field in many countries by 2014, the introduction of foreign theories greatly affects the progress of Chinese LL academia. Even so, Shang and Zhao's (2014a, 2014b) work only present the existing theory, neither scrutinising its intrinsic rationale nor discussing its applicability in China. There are no original conceptual frameworks proposed and no empirical studies applying the theory.

Nonetheless, spearheaded by Shang and Zhao (2014a, 2014b), the exploration of language on signs in China has shifted away from translation and towards sociolinguistics. In 2017, 10 LL articles are published in the Chinese Journal of Social Sciences, the most authoritative publication in the area of social sciences in China (Li & Feng, 2021). In 2019, 54 LL studies are conducted in China (Fu & Bai, 2020). In the first half of 2020, there were already 49 articles collected by CNKI.

Yet the most significant progress has been not in the number of publications, but in the expansion of theoretical and methodological boundaries. For instance, Li (2015) introduces Ben-Rafael's (2008) idea of collective-identity in examining the use of English on signs in Suzhou, explaining how this global lingua franca has been deconstructed and reconstituted locally. He discusses how foreign languages are adopted as a new source for identity construction, then experience variation and localisation in multilingual settings. Similarly, Yuan (2019) investigates the spread of English in Chaoshan area⁶, finding that while local language signs contain to English, there are still efforts to resist English hegemony and to build the solidarity with Chinese language and culture. Nonetheless, the 'hegemony' of English on signs worldwide has been shaped jointly by various decisive factors. Yuan's study (2019) focuses on this topic but fails at taking a more comprehensive consideration investigation and employing a multi-factor lens in interpretation of global context.

Beyond English, scholars in China have also started to focus on the presence of minority languages on signage. Xu and Ren (2015) examine the role of written signs in tourism and ethnic minority language revival. By studying Dongba scripts,⁷ they claim that though the visibility of Dongba is closely related to local tourism development, its communicative function is limited because Dongba is utilised just for symbolizing Naxi ethnic culture and pursuing commercial values, not for delivering information. The use of Dongba script on signs is casual and even incorrect. However, this research only described the phenomenon without offering in-depth explanations, such as considering local language policy and regulations.

With growing internationalisation and urbanisation, LL of domestic megacities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou drew substantial attention in recent years. Beyond focusing on the Chinese communities, there is also a growing interest in the migrant

⁶ A cultural region in eastern Guangdong centres on Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang, features Teochew dialect, distinctive cuisine, and rich folk traditions.

⁷ An ancient hieroglyph used by Naxi people in Yunnan Province

communities in China. For instance, Yu et al., (2016) investigate the Korean communities in Wangjing, Beijing and Gubei, Shanghai. This study finds that while Korean elements achieve notable visibility on signs and index strong “Koreaness” of the target areas, Chinese remains the dominant language in local “language competition”, linking community signage to broader questions of foreign-language planning and public language services. Aside from this, in the investigation of two foreign neighbourhoods in Guangzhou, Liao and Chan (2024) discuss how different ethnic groups hold distinctive socio-economic statuses within the same city. English on shop signs in the African neighbourhood indicates the main business here is trading low-end and cheap goods, with the signs being aimed directly at readers who are traders. They refer to this phenomenon as ‘low-end globalisation’, in contrast with what they found in the Korean neighbourhood, where the presence of Korean on shop signs was mainly used for symbolising the authenticity of food and was thus intended to attract residents and tourists.

As the field has developed, conceptualisations of the research site have also expanded. Following Oldenburg’s (1989) notion of ‘the third place’ which is defined as a place aside from home and workplace and a neutral ground for strangers to interact. the notion of ‘public sphere’ in LL studies is narrowed down to a specific type of place such as a coffee shop or a library, instead of an area (Kallen, 2023; Wee & Goh, 2019). However, in her ethnographic study of LL at coffee shops in a university town in Shanghai, Deng (2021) argues the “business first” ideology associated with contemporary socio-economic conditions and new media do not attest attributes of coffee shops as a neutrally interactional space anymore, indicates an increasingly commercialised society.

Another noticeable shift is the inclusion of online spaces. Song (2018) chooses a popular photo studio in Shanghai as the site to understand translingual practices at play as a commercial strategy. Through combining offline and online signs, Song scrutinises the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of language signs and the overall design of this studio,

Song recognises translingual practices as “an emergent register indexing an ‘emergent class’ tentatively labelled as ‘young urban elites’...(who) aspires for a consumption style that embraces...a taste of distinction” (p.478). This study creatively takes LL as an indicator of figuring out the tastes and needs of distinctive social classes. Luo et al., (2022) collect 156 Chinese university emblems and identified five recurrent elements i.e. colour, text, image, number, and contour. Through interpreting shared communicative strategies, such as concretising value, spirit, and mission by metaphor and multimodal design, they argue that the emblems of Chinese higher education are largely influenced by myriad factors including traditional Chinese culture, social changes, and internationalisation. We can see through these small but carefully designed emblems, the trail of history, the combination of cultures, and China’s contemporary socio-political conditions. This study provides a practical method or prototype for future studies to explain other highly symbolised signs.

2.5.2 Emerging directions

Several trends can be recognised within recent studies. The first is to dissect the impact of official language policy and evaluate its implementation. Signage is one area where governance is rendered visible, legible, and enforceable. Recent studies generally focus on areas where Mandarin Chinese is not the only language in daily life, especially ethnic minority areas.

Language use in ethnic minority regions reflects the complex, multi-ethnic cultures and has consistently been a central focus of sociolinguistic research in China. Regulated by legislation establishing Putonghua (standardised Mandarin) as the national common language in 1955⁸, the predominance of Mandarin on signs in public spaces has been long-established. Within this context, most scholars focus on policies towards maintaining and promoting minority languages.

⁸ On the *National Conference on Script Reform* in Beijing.

Walters (2023) analyses the use and meaning of Nuosu, a language of the Yi people through conducting an ethnographic study in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture⁹. The results lead to a significant disjunction between policy and real-life experience. Walters argued that though local top-down policy has supported and increased the visibility of Nuosu on streets, seldom do Nuosu scripts on signs carry informational contents, and such measures do not seem to bolster literacy practices relating to Nuosu. Similarly, Yao et al., (2023) explore the use of Nuosu in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture under the local government's efforts to of revitalise Nuosu. Yao's team find that the presence of Nuosu on signs is higher in the rural area where the Yi population is dominant but drops significantly in fast-developing areas where Han culture is dominant. Even though a range of language policies are issued, the visibility of Nuosu is minimal in local schools and textbooks, which has created an atmosphere for students where Nuosu is not welcome. The implementation of these policies has been inadequate, problematic, and even contradictory.

Nie and Wang (2025) use an apparent-time approach to examine changes in the linguistic landscape of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture over two decades. They find rising bi/multilingualism overall but diverging trends: official signs increasingly include Nuosu alongside Chinese, while private commercial signage tends to privilege Chinese, reducing Nuosu visibility. Moreover, Wang's study (2025) shows that signage patterns can vary sharply across districts in a city. Focusing on Xishuangbanna, an ethnic minority city in Yunnan Province, which is home to speakers of the Dai language, demonstrates that language visibility, and especially minority language presence differs by area, being shaped by district functions such as tourism and local governance.

The second trend is to investigate the effectiveness of multilingual practices through emphasizing readers' perceptions. While most previous studies addressed the role of producers of LL material, few considered the reactions of readers. Borrowing from

⁹ An autonomous region in southern Sichuan, China, centered on Xichang and home to a large Yi population

Trumper-Hecht's (2010) triad conceptual framework, which valorised experiential dimensions and inhabitants' perceptions in LL research, Han and Wu (2020) structure written interviews with residents in Guangzhou, a Cantonese speaking megacity in south China. Both consents and dissents are found. In general, inhabitants show a positive attitude towards using Simplified Chinese in signage, but their perceptions towards the use of Cantonese and English are relatively polarised.

While most informants support language diversity, some residents perceive the presence of English as an invasion of western culture; for those who does not speak Cantonese, some felt excluded seeing Cantonese on public signs. Han and Wu attribute such dissents to the conflicts between policies from the top and needs from the bottom and call for a harmonious bidirectional relationship between language planners and recipients. Shang (2021) scrutinises city dwellers' opinions about multilingual signs in three main cities of Eastern China and gains comparable results. Most citizens accommodate multilingual signs, and the environment towards foreign language in Eastern China is friendly. Comparatively speaking, young students show a more tolerant attitude towards deviant language forms, but working professionals are shown to prefer rigorous language standards. Therefore, personal factors such as birthplace, dialect and age could have significant effects on peoples' feelings and responses to displays of language diversity in their daily life.

The third tendency is to extend the scope of LL research sites from offline real world to online virtual spaces, responding to the increasing centrality of digital platforms in public communication. To shed light on the metrolingualism (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015), the relationships between language and the city, and extend the research to online spaces, Yao (2023b) screenshots and codes 180 WeChat¹⁰ Moments¹¹ as evidence of online LL from six friends who live overseas. She interprets participants' self-representations on social media platforms by drawing on their metrolingual

¹⁰ China's dominant all-in-one mobile app that combines messaging with social media.

¹¹ WeChat's semi-private social feed where users share photos and updates.

practices and argued that these identities are distinctive because metrolingual practices in online spaces are temporary, highly fluid, and often opaque. The use of privacy settings in virtual places has exceeded the traditional boundary between public and private signs.

Cao (2025) examines online LL on Douyin¹² by focusing on how the “new farmer” persona, “in China has emerged as a result of the country’s ongoing rural restructuring” (p.2), is built and circulated through short-video content and its surrounding interactional ecology. This study treats Douyin videos as multimodal sign complexes, such as oral performances, comments, bullet screens, hashtags, and displays how these elements jointly mediate an entrepreneurial rural identity in digital space. It brings the language, practices, and perspectives of online publics into sociolinguistic analysis as identity construction strategies, highlights digital affordances through displaying the understanding of offline Chinese rural context in online space and through expanding the application and discussion of LL research on identity construction and negotiation.

The fourth trend is applying LL analysis to processes of urban change, with particular attention to the semiotic work of redevelopment, consumption, and the management of “city image.” Extending earlier LL approaches that conceptualise public signage as a means of symbolically producing places (e.g. Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Scollon & Scollon, 2003), these studies argue that language choice and visual design are active instruments through which neighbourhood meanings are reconfigured. Luo and Tsung (2025), for instance, connect LL directly to gentrification in a historic Kunming neighbourhood in Yunnan Province. Drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) triad model and combining systematic documentation of signage with contextual interpretation, they demonstrate how gentrification is constructed or counteracted through semiotic reorganisation. They emphasise that shifts in sign aesthetics, linguistic repertoires, and branding strategies reshape the neighbourhood’s imagined public space by indexing

¹² China’s leading short-video app. TikTok’s mainland counterpart

which part of local history and identity are made legible, commercially valuable, or erased. In this respect, their findings resonate with broader LL arguments that signage mediates symbolic inclusion and exclusion in the making and remaking of urban space (e.g. Zukin et al., 2009; Trinch & Snajdr, 2017).

Li (2025) studies Shanghai's Huaihai street, which is commonly positioned as a high-profile retail and tourism area, through the anthropological notion of "liminality". By pairing LL analysis with a street-level observations, Li connects sign configurations to tourist subject positions and the regulatory-commercial environment. Methodologically, this study shifts LL research toward mobility and in-situ reading practices rather than relying solely on static sign results, and it treats policy as something enacted through routine semiotic decisions. Empirically, Li shows how language policy and urban tourism co-produce a normative landscape: certain languages and styles are naturalised for consumption, while those less aligned with market logics become comparatively less visible.

Ma et al., (2025) extend this discussion by analysing Eastern Suburb Memory in Chengdu, an industrial heritage area remade through redevelopment, via a scalar-chronotopic lens. They set top-down and bottom-up semiotic landscapes in direct relation and show how different stakeholders deploy competing time-space imaginaries (e.g., industrial nostalgia, nationalist historical framing, and creative-cultural futurity) to legitimise city branding and consumption. Their findings suggest that bottom-up semiotics can generate alternative interpretations of place but are frequently filtered by or partially absorbed into official redevelopment narratives. This interplay highlights a common argument in LL research on urban change, that resistance and incorporation are entangled within the semiotic management of redevelopment (e.g., Heller et al., 2014).

Overall, this body of work demonstrates how LL research provides a sensitive lens for tracing the symbolic and ideological work of urban transformation. By focusing on

signage as both material and discursive practice, these studies reveal how neighbourhood change, gentrification, and city-image management are enacted not only through planning policies and economic investment but also through everyday semiotic choices that redefine place identity, memory, and belonging.

To conclude, LL research in China has developed rapidly but is still in its infancy. Theoretically, the conceptual frameworks of most existing studies are one dimensional, and many studies fail at capturing the complexity of linguistic signs. Geographically, most Chinese LL research has taken place in economically prosperous coastal cities or remote ethnic minority areas. Explorations of the linguistic landscapes of larger inland cities are comparatively scant. Methodologically, there is a predominant focus on quantitative methods, but the practical application of qualitative analysis is limited. At present, few studies within China have applied a semiotic or multimodal approach. The role and function of non-verbal factors and semiotic resources on signage remains underestimated and underdeveloped. Finally, few studies have noticed the effect of digital affordances on place-making in this digital era and considered online LL.

To address these existing research gaps, the present study investigates LL in Chongqing, a geographically less-noticed city in existing Chinese LL research, but an economically and politically centre in Southwestern China. Besides, this study applies the mixed-methods approach to have a thorough examination of LL in Chongqing from a general overview to in-depth details with multi-layered analytical frameworks. Last, this study includes online signs to highlight digital affordances in the interpretation of how signage helps shape passengers' affective experiences in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has reviewed a range of empirical LL studies relevant to the present project, from pioneering foundational works to recent emerging trends. The review has

demonstrated LL research as significant to understanding societal issues such as multilingualism and identity construction. It has also located research gaps through evaluating LL studies in China and in public transport spaces. In China-focused scholarship, the application of in-depth qualitative analysis remains insufficient, especially in studies of inland regions. Both within China and abroad LL research on public transport spaces has largely relied on small-scale investigations, with limited generalisation of findings and little analysis of transport hubs. Drawing on the literature presented in this chapter, the following chapter will introduce the conceptual framework and research design of the present study.

Chapter 3

LL Theories and the Present Study

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks that inform LL research and the analytical frameworks of the present study. It begins by reviewing foundational studies that established core concepts and early methodological approaches in the field. It then traces theoretical developments from spatial theories of the production of space to semiotic and multimodal perspectives that examine how meaning is produced through the coordination of linguistic, visual, and material resources. This chapter also introduces four theoretical frameworks as the crucial analytical lens of the present study, including geosemiotics, assemblage, affective regimes, and Bourdieusian sociology. These frameworks provide the conceptual basis for the analyses developed in the chapters that follow.

3.2 Introduction to LL theories

3.2.1 Pioneering theories and methodologies

The field of linguistic landscape, defined as investigating visible written language in the public sphere (Blommaert & Maly, 2014), has drawn increasing attention in recent years. Though the exploration of this research area started in the late 1900s (Gorter, 2013), linguistic landscapes have been in human society since ancient times as long as

human have made visible language marks on the ground or on a stone. Coulmas (2008) introduces famous ancient linguistic landscapes such as the Codex Hammurabi and the Rosetta Stone, then lead us to appreciate those monuments from a sociolinguistic perspective by interpreting their contents, targeted readers, social contexts, language choices, and symbolic meaning, stating that “linguistic landscaping is as old as writing” (Coulmas, 2008, p.13).

Before Linguistic Landscape was recognised as a sub-field of sociolinguistics, interest in the language on signs at public places has emerged with some initial conceptual ideas. For instance, Rosenbaum et al. (1977) notice that the prevalence of language on signs is associated with official language policy, and that there are distinctions between bottom-down and top-up signs. Decades later, a widely recognised flagship study took place in Québec, when Landry and Bourhis (1997) applied the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality in a study of investigating francophone students’ LL experiences in multilingual settings. They define LL as a sociolinguistic factor with informative and symbolic function and suggest that LL is strongly related to the vitality of a linguistic community. This is true to the extent that LL can even have a carryover effect on language behaviour. These two authors contribute the most frequently quoted definition of LL: “The language of public road signs, ...or urban agglomeration.” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25).

However, both Spolsky (2008) and Huebner (2008) criticise the definition of LL as disunified, and the classification of LL items are still controversial, which might lead to different results or bias. Gorter (2013) emphasises that the number of LL types is increasing with societal developments and changes in our daily lives, thus the boundary of what counts as a type of LL is broadening over time. He suggests several new items including graffiti, scrolling banners, and even souvenirs as LL components.

Spearheaded by Landry and Bourhis (1997), later research had continued to examine the role of LL in society and to make theoretical pushes to broaden the boundaries of

the research field. Scollon and Scollon (2003) argue that considering how and where signs are placed is vital in interpreting LL items because a shared major property of language and signs is indexicality, which can turn the information on signs into real meaning. They ground the social meaning and placement of language signs in the material world in a theory which they term 'geosemiotics'. Another significant contribution of Scollon and Scollon (2003) is that the geosemiotics theory supports defining LL as an interdisciplinary research field by identifying three main systems: interaction order, visual semiotics, place semiotics. Analysing the interrelations of these systems involves disciplines such as linguistic anthropology, social psychology, visual design, and urban planning.

Combining previous discussion on Backhaus's (2006) research, he links language choice on signs to power and solidarity through authorship: top-down/official signage indexes power relations, while bottom-up/non-official signage tends to signal solidarity. He offers a practical framework for reading regulation, legitimation, identity, and audience alignment from public signage. Nevertheless, Huebner (2008) argues that the categorisation of bottom-up and top-down signs is variable according to social situation and personal understanding, with boundary between the two types being ambiguous and subjective. For instance, an announcement in a building produced by the management is a top-down sign for residents, but a bottom-up sign from the perspective of the government.

Early LL research was strongly shaped by quantitative-distributive methods, which counts the number of signs and compares their distributions. While such approaches still remain valuable for making broad patterns of linguistic presence, absence, and hierarchy in public space visible, scholars also have moved beyond toward more diverse methodologies.

For instance, one important development is Cenoz and Gorter's (2008) attempt to recognise the close connection between the economic value of language signs and

linguistic diversity, arguing that multilingual signs have both market and non-market value. They suggest that the absence of a language on signs can cause economic losses. They introduce an econometric model named contingent valuation method (CVM) which can “be used as a way to estimate the total monetary value of a good or service” (p.61) as a strong tool for future research to examine the relationship between LL and economy, and the total economic value of signs.

The second development concerns the increasing use of digital and geospatial tools. Barni and Bagna (2008) use a computer program named MapGeoLing in their study. They document the exact geographical locations of language signs in Italy and Italian signs in other countries with MapGeoLing and demonstrate how the software can help with offering a multiple-level analysis on discussing the ‘Italianism’ of those signs. They emphasise that geo-referencing methods can enable us to interpret signs synchronically and diachronically from various dimensions. Vingron et al. (2017) track six French-English bilinguals’ eye movements when viewing 60 LL images. The findings suggest that French L1 bilinguals and English L1 bilinguals show different viewing patterns, but both need more time to process L2 text on signs. This technology allows us to detect people’s patterns of attention when viewing multilingual signs and offers a promising new way of analysing LL items through understanding what people notice and how they process languages.

Early methodological development can also be seen from the expansion and diversification of research sites, which shift the focus from the classic street-level signage to LL in institutions, mediated spaces, and broader semiotic environments. For instance, Hanauer (2008) explores signs on the representative wall space in a microbiology laboratory, examining LL from a new perspective by assigning it with scientific and educational purposes. Brown (2012) proposes schools as a distinctive research site and suggests “schoolscape” as a pedagogical resource in educational space, which helps in learning, identity formation, and language revitalisation. Ivković and

Lotherington (2009) constructively extend the scope of the public sphere to cyber space, and bring up the concept of virtual linguistic landscape, arguing that the visibility of language in digital environments also matters.

Overall, pioneering LL studies laid solid theoretical and methodological foundations that continue to shape the research field today. They frame the visibility of language use in public spheres as a mirror of the society and shed light on what LL research should look for in language in use. These early studies opened the door and prepared the space for later research. The following sections will trace the theoretical development of LL in line with directions the present study intends to explore.

3.3 Linguistic landscape as a social practice

3.3.1 Authorship, agency, and audience

One theoretical development in LL is to treat signage as social practice and draw on the interactional and anthropological theories to conceptualise how signs are produced by socially situated actors. LL scholars frequently draw on Goffman's (1981) participation framework, which distinguishes the layered production chain of signs and has proven especially productive for analysing institutional and commercial signage, where authorship is often distributed across layers of governance which retain ideological control over language choice (e.g. Piller, 2016; Wee, 2021). In such cases, signs cannot be attributed to a single speaker but must be understood as polyphonic artifacts that materialise institutional voice and power relations in space (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Backhaus, 2006).

Extending this perspective, Ahearn's (2001) theorisation of agency as a socio-culturally mediated capacity for action offers a key framework for explaining how sign producers work within or against the constraints of the LL. Agency, in this view, is not reducible to individual intention, but simultaneously circumscribed by historically sedimented and socially organised conditions. Applied to LL research, this framing supports an

understanding of signage as purposeful yet bounded practice, patterned by language policy, commercial imperatives, literacy conventions, and locally circulating language ideologies (Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2009). Accordingly, signs that appear “noncompliant” or stylistically inventive, such as those which contain hybrid orthographies, graphic stylisation, and selective translation, can be read as agentive negotiations of regulatory and ideological pressures rather than arbitrary departures from norms. Agency in the linguistic landscape is therefore best treated as relational, arising through actors’ engagements with institutional authority, economic rationalities, and place-specific semiotic regimes (Blommaert, 2013).

Beyond a focus on producers and their agency, discourse-oriented LL work also shows that public signage is shaped by how producers orient to audiences. Bell’s (1984) concept of audience design, originally developed to explain style shifting in spoken interaction, has been fruitfully extended to signage to argue that linguistic and semiotic choices are often tuned to imagined publics rather than to physically co-present readers. In most linguistic landscapes, these publics are multiple and unequally positioned: local residents, institutional members, tourists, migrants, and transnational consumers bring different repertoires and attach different symbolic values to languages and scripts. As a result, choices about language selection, script, visual prominence, and translation can be read as practical signals of target audience groups whom a sign is intended for including, excluding, or marginalising (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Leeman & Modan, 2009).

An audience orientation also aligns with Bakhtinian notions of dialogism and heteroglossia, which underpin viewing the linguistic landscape as discourse practice. Signs can be approached as contributions to ongoing public conversations. They respond to earlier texts and stances whether policy directives, commercial conventions, or activist interventions, and they anticipate interpretation, uptake, and sometimes contestation (Bakhtin, 1981; Blommaert, 2013). From this angle, features such as

multilingual layering or the graphic demotion of particular scripts become ways of positioning a sign in relation to dominant language ideologies, even when overt resistance is not expressed. Combining Goffman's participation roles and Ahearn's ideas of mediated agency, Bell's (1984) framework supports a view that signage does not simply reflect who lives in a place but plays an active role in shaping publics and organising social alignments in space.

In sum, these theoretical discussions frame the LL as an evolving arena of social practice where relations among actors, audiences, and institutions are repeatedly worked out through LL activity. Goffman (1981) helps separate questions of authorship from those of authority, Ahearn conceptualises sign-making as agency that is socially mediated and constrained, and Bell draws attention to how imagined publics shape both linguistic selection and visual organisation. Read through wider LL frameworks that underscore emplacement and power, this toolkit moves analysis beyond counting signs to explaining how LL actively contribute to the formation of social relations, identities, and inequalities in public space. Thus, in the present study, public transport hubs are treated as institutionally organised social actors that mediate between authoritative sign producers and the public audience.

Building on the view of LL as social practice where signs emerge through mediated agency, audience orientation, and layered authorship, it becomes easier to see why LL matters for language policy. Since public signage is produced through the interplay of multiple actors, imagined publics, and institutional authorities, then the landscape is not simply a neutral setting in which policy appears, but a practical arena in which policy is realised, read, and argued over. The same concepts used to analyse who "speaks" through signs, how agency is constrained, and which audiences are addressed therefore provide a strong basis for examining how language policy operates beyond official texts, through routine semiotic choices in everyday spaces. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the practice of signage in language policy.

3.3.2 LL theories on language policy

Landry and Bourhis (1997) introduce the concept of LL by noting that the idea first developed in the field of language planning, a term they do not differentiate from language policy. They explain the significant role of LL in language policy: “language planners as well as language activists can ill afford to ignore the issue of the linguistic landscape as a tool to promote language maintenance or reverse language shift” (p.46). This notion of the practical value of the LL in relation to language policy has been taken up widely in subsequent studies (e.g., Gorter 2006; Backhaus 2006; Shohamy et al., 2010). In general, LL is treated as the implementation and symbolisation of language policy, or the *de facto* practice of language policy, while *de jure* language policy sets constrictions on language choices, habits, and ideologies and function as an explanation of how language should be used and organised in public places (Phan & Starks, 2020). As du Plessis (2012) claims, there is a casual relationship between language policy and LL which is not necessarily one dimensional, as will be discussed in the following section.

The mismatch between LL and language policy is frequently discussed, which to some extent explains why the comparison between *de facto* (practiced) language policy and *de jure* (formal) language policy are crucial (Schiffman, 1996; Shohamy, 2006). Wang and Xu (2018) detect discordance on this issue among Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia. The *de jure* monolingual policy of Malay can meet neither their political motivations nor economic needs, thus these two minority communities choose multilingual signs which oppose the policy, but which supply adequate language resources for them. Monolingual language policy cannot cater to complex language usage and provide proper services in multilingual communities. Conversely, Keles et al. (2020) finds that although many Turkish universities claim to offer and support English-medium instruction (EMI) programs, their official websites remain largely inaccessible to non-Turkish speakers. English-language content online is often

inconsistent, incomplete, or difficult to understand. This suggests that de jure language policy is not adequately implemented in practice: the resulting de facto language policy becomes exclusionary and fails to achieve its intended goals.

Furthermore, insightful results are gained from Csernicsek and Beregszászi's (2019) study which examines LL on banknotes in Transcarpathia, an ethnically diverse region in Ukraine, bordered by Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Inscriptions on various series of banknotes point to a commonality that the languages used on banknotes will always be a result of the dominant linguistic policies in the culture in question and planned at the government level with political intentions. Multilingual banknotes always convey the message that the government intends to be tolerant to its nationalities, and a certain extent of federalistic intention.–

Though the interaction between LL and language policy is bidirectional, in most cases, their relationship and interactions are multi-layered and dynamic. For instance, different languages can be put at the centre of particular contexts. Valijärvi and Kahn (2020) explore LL in Nuuk, Greenland, under a trilingual environment. They find that the indigenous language West Greenlandic is usually at the centre of bi/multilingual signs, functioning both informationally and symbolically. The lingua franca English dominates when providing information to international audiences, or when locals want to utilise it as a symbol of modernity and luxury. The former colonial language of Danish is the language needed for gaining an upper secondary school diploma, meaning that young people must prioritise it to access higher education. This constantly negotiated process shapes and reshapes social norms, language awareness, and language policy, which further reflects local politics, economy, and education. A similar mode is found at a Christian church in Philippines (Esteron, 2021), where Latin is used for indicating a long local history, Filipino for official functions, the local languages of Pangasinan and Ilocano for churchgoers, and English for internationalism and tourism.

When language policy strictly constrains language displays on signs, such relationship provides individual agents opportunities to find a creative way to redefine their signs. A notable method is hybridity, which means melding two languages and blurring their boundaries. Hybridity is distinct from standard multilingual signs. In Pavlenko's (2012) study, bivalent words are employed to combat the undervaluation of Russian as a minority ethnic language in Ukrainian language policy. Lipovsky and Wang (2019) notices French-English signs under the long-stand "one language" policy in France. Hult (2018) explains the phenomenon that when departures from the rules happen, such as when linguistic landscape actors selectively use, reinterpret, or work around formal written policies, the resulting signage and practices produce a parallel linguistic landscape that reworks official policy discourse into new signs and meanings. Hybridity is also used to draw attention from both local and international audiences in trade. Phan and Starks (2020) find the melded use of Vietnamese and English on trademarks as an innovative strategy to expand new markets.

Taken from a historical perspective, LL and language policy are epitomes of the past of a nation. A case in point is the significant traces of colonial history in colonised countries. In Pütz's (2020) study of Cameroon, an African country colonised by Germany, England, and France, he posits that new colonial masters sought to sweep away the marks of previous colonisers and injure local language and culture through imposing and enhancing their languages power in the newly acquired land. Mellinger's (2019) research aligns with this finding, demonstrating that the U.S. tries to superimpose power over previous Spanish rule in Puerto Rico through linguistic and cultural signs, thus leading to multiple and conflicting language policies.

Both Cameroon and Puerto Rico have continued to legislate colonial languages as official languages instead of their Indigenous languages even after independence. The same scene happens in many African countries, such as Rwanda (Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, 2022) leading to a long-standing debate of linguistic genocide in Africa.

Linguistic inequality is displayed through signs, and the lack of visibility of local languages on signage is provocative for future research. Religious conflict is another vital historical factor influencing language policy. Yusuf and Putrie (2022) argue that the mosque functions as a contested social space where Nahdlatul Ulama–affiliated and non-NU communities negotiate religious identity and ideology. They define the place of worship as “the most accurate indicator of the level of the prestige enjoyed by the various languages found in a multilingual country” (p.3), therefore, the visibility of languages is particularly sensitive in these settings. To avoid misinterpretation, English is used as a neutral language in Indonesian mosques to create a buffer zone for different religious groups and keep the environment “clean”. Likewise, Coluzzi and Kitade (2015) also acknowledge the neutral role of English in Malaysian worship places, and its function in interethnic communications.

3.4 LL theories: From space to place

3.4.1 The production of space

To demonstrate the role of linguistic signs in the construction of public space, it is first necessary to clarify how space is formed through semiotic practice (e.g., Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Dubreil et al., 2023; Gorter, 2013;). Developments in theories of the production of space provide the theoretical foundation for the analytical lenses adopted in this study, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7.

Lefebvre’s (1991) understanding of space as a social product has been widely adopted in LL research. Lefebvre (1991) addresses space as a social product and by building understanding upon the dynamic interaction between the three-layered dimensions, in a “perceived-conceived-lived triad” model. “Perceived space” corresponds to the spatial practice of materials and human physical actions through everyday routines. “Conceived space” refers to the representations of space, the professional discourses and codified depictions from powerful social groups such as planners, architects, and scientist, “shot through with a knowledge ... a mixture of understanding and ideology”

(p.26). “Lived space” refers to the representational space, the affective and symbolic realm through which inhabitants experience and feel, drawn from both collective and individual histories.

Sayer (2010) draws explicitly on Lefebvre’s (1991) triadic paradigm to conceptualise the language-learning classroom as a produced space by LL-based practices and interactions. Another example of an LL study employing Lefebvre’s (1991) model is Luo and Tsung (2025), who use it as a reference in their examination of a historic neighbourhood in Kunming, China, arguing that tourist-oriented LL gentrifies and reconfigures the urban heritage space semiotically.

At the same time, LL scholars highlight several limitations and tensions of applying this triad model to understanding space. One concern is that treating spaces as static layered surface may risk ignoring the ongoing relational process and underplaying the simultaneous participation of other practices (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Blommaert, 2013). Massey (2005) suggests that Lefebvre’s framework is grounded in European capitalist cities with modernist urban bias, and that its applicability to feminist, postcolonial, indigenous or rural settings needs careful reworking. Blommaert (2013) and Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) suggest extending the triadic model through combining the ethnographic and mobility-oriented perspectives, enabling a more solid trace of how signage is produced, removed, and reinterpreted across temporal and spatial trajectories.

Drawing on Lefebvre (1991), Trumper-Hecht (2010) proposes a triadic analytical model for LL research which becomes widely referenced (e.g., Alamillo, 2025; Han & Wu, 2020; Luo & Tsung, 2025). Trumper-Hecht uses it to examine the shifting visibility of Arabic as perceived by Arab and Jewish residents in mixed Israeli cities. She avoids framing LL research as just a collection of signs on an abstract map but proposes it as a sociolinguistic-spatial phenomenon embodied in the experiences of the pedestrians walking through cities in Israel. Based on her definition, the three-

dimensional model of LL consists of (1) “LL practice”, which refers to the actual distribution of languages on signs; (2) “language policy”, which refers to political or ideological dimensions of signage shaped by authorities; and (3) “residents’ perceptions”, which refers to how pedestrians feel about what they see on signs. The study found that despite the high visibility of Arabic in Arab neighbourhoods and its (then) official status, it is marginal in Jewish-majority areas where the public signage is dominated by Hebrew. Arab residents experience the absence of Arabic as marginalisation, but Jewish residents perceive it as normal or unremarkable, revealing the under-representation of Arabic in mixed urban spaces from an integrated resident-centred perspective.

In LL research, the distinction between space and place is generally noted, moving from a concern with the physical display of signage to how signage becomes a meaningful social actor. As forementioned, early LL works take space as a material, mappable container in which signs appear and language vitality can be inferred (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), or the public areas signage occupies, marks boundaries, hierarchies, and power relations are made visible and reproduced in everyday urban life (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Scollon and Scollon (2003) refine the notion of space in their geosemiotics work as the material and visual organisation where semiotic resources are emplaced. The shift from space to place is largely driven by the uptake of human practice and geographic theory, such as Lefebvre’s (1991) three-layered model, which proposes space as socially co-constructed, and Massey’s (2005) relational view of space as dynamic and political. Space is then an outcome of social practices of spatiality.

Following this theoretical turn, more recent scholarship explicitly centres the role of signage in place-making. Place is usually framed as what a space comes to mean, the socially and discursively produced meaning attached to the material environment, and the making of a place is the mutual effort and interaction between people, space, and semiotic resources. Peck et al., (2018) explains making sense of place by highlighting

how signage and other semiotic resources address issues of belonging and marginalisation in identity, in which they depict place as the accumulation of layered meanings, emotions, and power relations. Tufi (2022) demonstrates the construction of a square as a place in a longitudinal study in Naples which addresses both local and migrant identities through linguistic signs, semiotic artefacts, and discursive materials from interviews, revealing the dynamic role of LL as a process shaped by but also reflected in social relations. Place then comes to have symbolic meaning for those who inhabit, traverse, or are excluded from it. The shift from the production of space to place-making in LL research marks the changing perspective of treating LL as a static, countable scene to a dynamic, fluid, and negotiated process.

3.4.2 Geosemiotics

A widely taken-up and influential semiotic framework in material-spatial analysis is Scollon and Scollon’s geosemiotics (2003), which is defined as “the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world” (p.2). Geosemiotics serves as a useful analytic lens in analysing the observable patterning of languages and signs across a site, and in providing in-depth interpretations of how particular places become meaningful through everyday semiotic practices. This framework conceptualises semiotics in the material world through three core systems: visual semiotics, the interaction order, and place semiotics, which are employed by the present study as its main analytical lens to investigate how LL helps in forming transport hub's social functions and evoking passengers' affective responses. The full detail of three systems is displayed in the Table 3.1 below (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 20-21).

Table 3. 1: Full detail of geosemiotics’ three systems

Visual Semiotics	The Interaction Order
<i>Represented participants</i> narrative	<i>Resources</i> the sense of time

<p>conceptual</p> <p><i>Modality</i></p> <p>colour saturation colour differentiation colour modulation contextualization representation depth illumination brightness</p> <p><i>Composition information</i></p> <p>centred</p> <p> circular triptych centre-margin</p> <p>polarised</p> <p> left-right (given-new) top-bottom (ideal-real)</p> <p><i>Interactive participants</i></p> <p>producer – image participant image participant – image participant image participant – viewer / reader</p>	<p>Urgency</p> <p> monochronism / polychronism</p> <p>perceptual spaces</p> <p> visual auditory olfactory thermal haptic</p> <p>interpersonal distances</p> <p> personal social public</p> <p>personal front</p> <p> sign equipment civil inattention</p> <p><i>Units of the interaction order</i></p> <p>single with file or procession queue contact service encounter conversational encounter meeting people - processing encounter</p> <p> interview screening examination</p> <p>platform event celebration occasion</p>		
<p>Place Semiotics</p> <p><i>'Non-semiotic' spaces</i></p> <p><i>Semiotic spaces</i></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>pictures</p> <p> code reference</p> <p> centre – margin top – bottom left – right earlier – later</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>spaces</p> <p> frontstage/ public exhibit/display passage special use secure</p> </td> </tr> </table>		<p>pictures</p> <p> code reference</p> <p> centre – margin top – bottom left – right earlier – later</p>	<p>spaces</p> <p> frontstage/ public exhibit/display passage special use secure</p>
<p>pictures</p> <p> code reference</p> <p> centre – margin top – bottom left – right earlier – later</p>	<p>spaces</p> <p> frontstage/ public exhibit/display passage special use secure</p>		

inscription fonts, letterform material qualities permanence or durability temporality or newness quality layering: add-ons or extensions state changes emplacement decontextualised transgressive situated exophoric situated ('feng-shui')	backstage or private discourses regulatory vehicle traffic pedestrian traffic public notice infrastructural public function notice public label commercial transgressive
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The interaction order is the first system in the framework. Borrowing from Goffman (1959), Scollon and Scollon (2003) expand it to include any analytical tools concerned with “the current, ongoing, ratified (but also contested and denied) set of social relationships we take up and try to maintain with the other people who are in our presence” (p. 16). Interaction order specifically outlines how people and signage interact. It focuses on the social norms and regulations that are adopted by social actors and then made evident through their interactions with the signs.

The second system within geosemiotic is visual semiotics, which focuses on the aspects of a sign, such as the text, image, and spatial arrangement of various components. The term ‘visual semiotics’ was coined by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) in their study of visual design. They proposed that visual elements such as colour saturation, colour differentiation, colour modulation, contextualisation, representation, depth, lighting, and brightness,

The third system of geosemiotics is place semiotics which focuses on how signage’s positions in the physical world make them indexical of meanings. Language use, inscription materials, contextual settings, and dominant discourses are used to

categorise signs. On the basis of their relative placement on signs, preferences for language codes can be analysed; the compositional arrangement can either index the linguistic community or symbolise the ideology of sign makers (Yao, 2023 b). The focus of the analysis of the inscription is on state transitions, substance, layering, and fonts. Stroud and Mpendukana (2009) add that through a variety of factors, including the medium of inscriptions, the substance of the signs, and the freshness of installations, materials transmit ideas about permanence, temporality, and quality. Signage might even be decontextualised or placed in settings where regulatory, infrastructural, commercial, or transgressive discourses are in vogue (Yao, 2023a).

Scollon and Scollon (2003) further legitimise this framework through referring to Hall's (1959, 1966) anthropological and proxemic notions (i.e., sense of time, interpersonal distance, perceptual spaces) as a conceptual hinge linking the interaction order to place and visual semiotics. In the present study, the notion of interpersonal distance contributes to understanding how different social relations and communicative events are organised. Hall (1966) defines four crucial distances (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p.53):

- *intimate distance (touch to 18 inches)*
- *personal distance (18 inches to 4 feet)*
- *social distance (4 feet to 12 feet)*
- *public distance (12 feet to 25 feet)*

This idea gives Scollon and Scollon (2003) a practical way to conceptualise how physical distance and the spatial arrangement of semiotic resources shape interactions in place. For instance, they note that “personal distance is the distance within which we feel we must engage in some kind of social interaction with the other person” (p.54). At close range, communication is more likely to be direct and personal, while at greater distances, it more readily takes on an impersonal, public-address quality and is often voiced through institutional discourses (e.g., rules, instructions, warnings). In

geosemiotic terms, distance thus helps sort out participants' rights and duties in place by signalling who may legitimately approach, linger, speak, read, or comply.

Another takeaway of taking up Hall's concept in geosemiotics is that signs are not simply placed in a location, but are positioned for particular ways of seeing and reading with social psychology. Some signs are designed for strangers passing at a distance with big lettering, high placement, minimal wording, while others assume readers will step in close and pay attention, like a notice on a door or small-print procedural guidance. In sum, Hall's proxemics helps connect design choices to interactional practices, including size, legibility, orientation, and placement, which extend to the broader geosemiotic claim is that understanding how the space organises people's movement, attention, and interaction around it is vital.

According to Yao's (2023a) complementary interpretation and of interaction order, the perception of time or duration depends on how urgent a situation is and how many actions are going on during a particular time. Perceptual spaces refer to the visual, auditory, olfactory, thermal, and tactile spaces, while practical analysis prioritises the first two. Interpersonal distances can be close, private, sociable, or public, depending on the distance between interlocutors. Personal confronts refers to how a person, when in the company of others, deliberately arranges involvement by taking into account the social order at play. Furthermore, Lee and Lou (2019) emphasise that the migration history of transnational communities has always been taken into account when analysing interaction order in empirical studies, showing how historical trajectories affect our understanding of common semiotic objects and place creation.

Other LL scholars' applications of this analytical framework have contributed further developments. Lou (2017) brings LL research into the lived, multisensory spaces of consumption by using geosemiotics to show how market interactions contribute to place-making in Hong Kong. She draws on video walks, interviews, and participant observation as part of a wider ethnographic project, examining three Hong Kong

markets through the experiences of three focal participants. The study argues that each market has its own distinctive geosemiotic arrangement, and that people's perceptions of the markets are shaped by what they notice and respond to in the moment, including language, visual cues, material features, and sensory impressions while moving through and interacting in the space. In this view, a "sense of place" is not simply there as a static background but is gradually built up through embodied everyday encounters with the market's semiotic and material environment.

Similarly, Andriyanti (2021) shows how a geosemiotic framework can help researchers make sense of the social meanings of school signage in a systematic way when working with a large dataset and considering the signs' multimodal design. Based on a dataset of 890 signs from five senior high schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, this study applies geosemiotics to trace how written language and visual elements work together across the schoolscape through identifying eight recurring thematic clusters: (1) location and direction, (2) morality and religion, (3) environment and energy, (4) school identity and information, (5) activities, (6) comportment, (7) science and knowledge, and (8) rules and regulations. Andriyanti (2021) further argues that meaning is produced through the coordinated deployment of three key modes: language, images, and colour, each of which draws on iconic and symbolic cues to represent what the author terms "school's social reality" (p. 105). In doing so, the school LL is read as indexing relationships between institutional sign producers and their intended audiences, including how schools position themselves and seek to shape student behaviour through semiotic practice.

Geosemiotics has been applied not only to LL (e.g. Lacsina & Yeh, 2022; Symes, 2021; Tran, 2021), but various fields. For instance, Pierce (2012) utilizes this framework in exploring interaction and power in her ESL classroom. In her study, how people move and use materials in a classroom was shown to demonstrate interaction order. Photographs of interactions among participants demonstrated visual semiotics, and

classroom design was examined through discourse in time and place as an expression of place semiotics. This methodology enables Pierce (2012), her students, and the ESL classroom operate as an ecological whole through their participation in structured interactions in different systems. Geosemiotics integrates different semiotic systems and offers a comprehensive viewpoint for socio-spatiality research. Peters (2019) utilises the analytical framework of geosemiotics in his urban design study of a central urban square in Oslo. At this square, which was designed in accordance with a street idea named “shared space”, visual semiotics were traffic signs and light signals, place semiotics were street design materials and layout, and interaction order was represented by users’ activities and travel modes. Peters’s (2019) research displays explicit interactions between different semiotic systems in urban design and highlights the role of users in influencing socio-spatiality.

While geosemiotics gains generally positive responses from later studies, several limitations should also be noted in its applicability to LL research. Wang (2005) argues that multilingual and “non-standard” public texts, especially those in which error or unconventional form is not the sign’s most meaningful feature, can create interpretive challenges for geosemiotic analysis, and therefore require careful contextual grounding to avoid overly confident or one-dimensional readings. Liao (2019) applies geosemiotics in museum-based translation research and finds that the concept of “place semiotics” lacks clear analytic leverage; the examination and interpretation across different “ranks of space” in designed environments always requires more explicit methods and tools to supplement the analysis of spatial organisation and visitor movement.

Since the focus of LL studies on signs can easily produce static results from what is visible at a single moment, Bloomaert (2016) argues that tracing how landscapes are produced, contested, and reshaped over time in shifting sociopolitical conditions is necessary, and calls for methodological corrective for synchronic and place-bound

geosemiotic work. One response to such critiques has been to push the analytic lens of LL research beyond language to multimodal ensembles to fluid and dynamic processes, expanding interpretation from signage to broader questions taken up in place-making.

3.5 LL theories: Situating affect in place

3.5.1 Affect and LL research

Affect, the socially constructed emotion, attitude, or disposition, is a vital concept in sociolinguistics to address how situations or things we feel have profound and long-lasting social meaning or impact (Pratt, 2023). The production of meanings always involves participants' cognitive behaviours and attachments, and how social relations and practices are embedded in location (e.g. Ahmed, 2004; Massumi, 2002). For instance, the examination of identity awareness can directly reflect the residents' sense of belonging. The theoretical interpretation of place-making emerges from how it is interpreted and felt by human agents. Bringing the dimension of experience and affect into LL discussion further pushes the understanding of lived experience, enabling an affective-oriented interpretation of how signage helps to make sense of a place.

Affect is shaped by everyday encounters happening in living environments through interactions between people, language, history, social norms, the body, and material and non-material objects (Kiesling, 2018; Threadgold, 2020). Berlant (2008) and Ahmed (2010, 2014) propose that affect can drive and reproduce social issues like gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. In this study, the analytical framework of examining affect at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport is substantially informed and guided by the following theories.

Understanding the effect of affect is highly significant in social sciences. Earlier works have demonstrated the economic values of affect. For instance, Pine and Gilmore (1999) describes how restricted affects are employed as a marketing strategy in the U.S. Berlant (2000) also identifies restricted affects as a new form of corporate culture. Later,

Ahmed (2004) proposes the notion of “affective economies”, in which she treats affect as a cultural and political “sticky” product adhering to language, bodies, or signs to create boundaries or collectivise communities. In this sense, affect is not an individual psychological movement but a circulated emotion within a group who feel related to each other, or against the other group. Forces, values, and social hierarchies are then gained during the process.

In sociolinguistics, affect is strongly associated with linguistic and semiotic resources in meaning-making. Wetherell’s (2012, 2015) concept of “affect practices” treats affect as a semiotic and somatic practice always entangled with meaning-making. Slobe (2018) demonstrates how voice, uptalk, and icons such as Starbucks cup and blonde hair make sense in constructing the boring and shallow affective qualitative of a given persona in “mocking white girl” performances. Kiesling (2018) traces the linguistic resources of affect in the investigation of gender performance he calls “masculine ease”, argues that affect emerges through stance-taking: “affect is an effect of such stance taking in speakers, addressees, audiences, conversations, and identities” (p. 192) and is vital in how social hierarchy is negotiated. Similarly, Pratt’s (2023) study focuses on cisgender young men from a public arts high school in the Bay area of California and finds affect as a site of institutional inequality. Pratt (2023) also adds that the semiotics of affect is a core dimension of sociolinguistic style which reflects ideologies, power structures, and indexes meanings.

Recent work in LL research increasingly approaches public signage not only as a record of linguistic distribution and ideological ordering, but also as a medium through which affect is generated, circulated, and regulated (e.g., Wee, 2025; Motschenbacher, 2020; Lang, 2024). This affect-oriented perspective moves beyond largely representational concerns about language display toward more experiential and interactional questions, such as how signs prompt, legitimise, or constrain particular feelings, and how these affects become anchored to places and publics (Liu, 2025). From this viewpoint, LL

analysis can show how semiotic resources attune environments to particular affects, for example, making them feel welcoming, threatening, intimate, official, or urgent.

COVID-19 signage has become one of the most generative sites for thinking about affect in linguistic landscapes, as signage overtly seeks to shape public sentiment and behaviour during public health crisis (Comer, 2022). Across many settings, pandemic notices and directives did more than convey rules or health information. They helped shape how people were expected to feel, such as creating urgency or fear, offering reassurance, and invoking solidarity, while casting publics as responsible, caring, or compliant subjects (Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2022). Studies on COVID-19 signs further shows that these affects circulated through both top-down and bottom-up meaning-making. Alongside official messages, handmade posters and grassroots artefacts often framed “community care” and either reinforced or subtly reshaped new social norms (Marshall, 2023; Douglas, 2022).

To conclude, the nature of socially produced and semiotically structured affect is reflected in the fact that signage can naturally become an affective infrastructure in public spaces (Wee, 2016; Milani & Richardson, 2021). Based on this point, the Bourdieusian sociology and Wee and Goh’s affective regimes (2019) will be introduced as they discuss how signage, everyday routines, and other semiotic resources shape recipients’ experiences of particular attachments and participate in the production of affective processes in place-making.

3.5.2 Affective regimes

One argument in existing LL scholarship is that affect is shaped in relation to the material world through encounters with objects and interactions in place. This lens is useful for LL study to enhance and deepen interpretations of meaning-making in designed environments (e.g. Massumi, 2002; Ahmed, 2004). In 2016, Wee proposes affective regimes as the conditions that define which affect (e.g. reverence, friendliness,

romance, exclusivity, etc.) can be expressed legitimately as appropriate and expected in a particular site.

In *Language, Space and Cultural Play*, Wee and Goh (2019) further develop the idea that affective regimes are produced through “affective governance” by semiotic landscapes, infrastructures, and spatial design, in which these agents cooperate to structure what the environment affords emotionally and how individuals are positioned within it. Wee and Goh’s (2019) work on affective regimes provide a focused approach to examining how signage and semiotic resources in a space privilege certain feelings while discouraging others.

Wee and Goh (2019) bring this framework into dialogue with “affective economies” to demonstrate that semiotic landscapes do not only stage affect, but also make it easier for affect to circulate and be taken up by wider publics. They connect small-scale semiotic resources such as tone, directives, and design choice to larger social norms and cultural backgrounding about what people should feel in particular setting. For instance, they offer a detailed interpretation of how *kawaii* (a Japanese term meaning cute) as an affective regime organising within public space the feeling of what is adorable. Drawing on the context of *kawaii* as a key component of Japanese material culture and aesthetics, they explain the regulation of *kawaii* works through multimodal orchestration such as fonts with *kawaii* styling which are “characterised by fine lines, rounded characters (and therefore the avoidance of sharp angles or edges), random insertions of hearts, and smiley faces” (p.34), or cute gestures and squeaky voices with *kawaii* attributes.

On this reading, *kawaii* becomes a mechanism to evoke and circulate specific affective responses through ensembles of semiotic resources and communicative practices in public space. There is a shared appreciation of *kawaii* in Japanese society in that the concept can inspire sense of cuteness and tenderness, making it an institutional strategy for government use. A nationwide phenomenon is that local governments brand

themselves with a cartoon mascot and *kawaii* name to popularise in public semiotic landscapes, such as the black bear Kumamon from Kumamoto prefecture, for the purpose of reducing distance between the government and the public and promoting civil operation through fostering the desired affective responses.

Research has demonstrated that the concept of affective regimes travels well across various contexts in LL research. Beside micro-level analyses of the interplay between affects and semiotic resources, researchers have linked the concept of affective regimes to broader issues such as civic order, heritage display, or sexual normativity. Motschenbacher's (2023) study on Wilton Drive in Florida examines how public signage reproduce the street as a homonormative space through multimodal critical discourse analysis. He identifies affective regimes of love, tolerance, and homonationalism from affect-related lexical choices such as solidarity slogans and visual presentations such as LGBT symbols. These regimes operate together to build an affective community on the Drive and invite belonging for those who display similar identity and affective responses. A similar analysis appears in Ng's (2019) work which identifies affect as a branding resource on semiotic landscapes in Singapore Management University through specific affective subjectives, such as positioning students as self-managing and aspirational subjects. This strategic use of affective regime aligns with the neoliberal context of higher education, inspiring students to maximise their potential by placing them into preferred orientations.

The application is expanded to broader contexts. As an illustration, Lang and Numtong (2024) locate their focus on heritage and transcultural place-making. They investigate Chinese New Year culture in Bangkok's commercial districts, collect images with cultural symbols and festival signage. While also drawing on Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics, they interpret how emplacement, interaction order, and visual semiotics orient visitors toward experiences of Chinese festival culture. Liao and Chan (2025) address the mediation of affective regimes in a Covid-19 context. Handwritten

text and drawings by Chinese frontline healthcare workers on their protective gear, these “graffities” are understood as mediated semiotic action for connection and affective alignment between health workers and the public, displaying how the pandemic is experienced, felt, and related to public crisis discourse.

A recurring concern of affect research is the tendency for blurring the term “affect” with “emotion” in applied studies. While Massumi (2002) suggests emotion as “qualified intensity”, Leys (2011) and Papoulias and Callard (2010) argue that affect is still often invoked as a vague, pre-discursive concept that risks conceptual looseness. Making explicit what sense of affect is being theorised with clear evidence from texts and objects to show how practices, meanings, normative expectations are organised is strongly recommended (Scheer, 2012). The probabilistic and audience-dependent nature of affect determines that it can be challenging to ensure people take a particular feeling up in the same way, as different participants can encounter, interpret, negotiate what is being expected differently. Affective regimes cannot be assumed as a single shared emotional outcome automatically produced by semiotic landscapes. Instead, they can be fluid and multi-layered, with their analysis combining approaches such as interview, ethnography, or other interactional data (Wee & Goh, 2019).

3.5.3 Affect and Bourdieusian sociology

Bourdieu’s sociology (see Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990) provides a powerful account of how social relations are embedded in bodies as disposition to perceive and feel in particular ways through addressing inequality and injustice. In earlier works, Bourdieusian concepts are usually employed in analysing the feelings and experiences of classes (e.g. Skeggs, 1997; Lareau, 2003; Reay, 2004) and in studies centred on language as a social behaviour with power and impact (e.g. Hanks, 2005; Grenfell, 2011). Bourdieu’s five concepts: habitus, field, capital, symbolic violence, and illusion, offer a framework to understand inequalities through material resources, explicit representations, and arousing affects such as shame, ease, and embarrassment. In this

sense, even though Bourdieusian sociology does not produce a standalone affect theory, his work contributes to explain how affects are socially structured and unequally distributed in places, and thus inspires a theoretical background for this study. I will start with introducing the notion of habitus and capital as two core concepts highlighted by the present study.

Bourdieu defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable disposition, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (1977, p.72.). Habitus functions as a “memory pad” and reflects patterned ways of perceiving and feeling under specific social conditions. Threadgold (2020) sees habitus as “emotional trajectories” and gives a detailed example in the experience of being sick associated with memories of a sterile environment and medical practices in a hospital always making him terrified and anxious whenever he’s there. Such feelings habitually exist with the place in a durable way, indicating that what begins in childhood structures the experiences thereafter (Skeggs, 2004). Therefore, the notion of habitus helps to decode how physical environments and structures become internal dispositions and impact behaviours.

Capital is a concept referring to accumulated and exchangeable resources capable of bringing power and profit and dividing social groups. The key forms Bourdieu distinguishes are economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. Economic capital reflects how materiality such as money, property, and financial assets change one’s orientation to the world. Adkin (2018) points out how such transformation can change the way time is experienced. For example, people with appreciating assets, such as housing or investment portfolios, can use expected future gains to create advantages in the present. By contrast, those who rely mainly on wages while carrying debt often experience time as ongoing pressure, structured by repayment deadlines and a persistent sense that stability is being pushed further into the future. Threadgold (2020) believes that materialisation and financialisation also inspire different affective

experiences. For instance, setting superannuation is a strategy to get the working-class to emotionally commit to capitalism. Economic capital always converts into other forms of capital, getting into an elite school brings more educational privilege and opportunities which will convert into cultural capital.

Cultural capital includes valued cultural competencies and resources. Bourdieu develops this notion in three detailed stages: embodied cultural capital refers to acquired competencies over time through socialisation, e.g. learning playing the piano for years; objectified cultural capital refers to materialised cultural goods that can be bought or sold, e.g. owning an expensive piano; and institutionalised cultural capital is the acknowledged outcome of the cultural competence, e.g. attaining a degree in classical piano. Cultural capital can also convert into other forms of capital. Sharing an interest in arts and literature with others is a form of social capital which brings the experience of togetherness.

Social capital is networks and institutionalised relationships. People are more likely to build relationships with those who have access to similar resources such as information opportunities, and institutions such as schools, clubs, and associations. Such inclusion aggregates groups who can share or exchange resources and creates affective bonds within groups because “homophily is an affective affinity where people stick together” (Threadgold, 2020, p.90), while it can also produce social closure and reproduce existing inequalities.

Symbolic capital is an abstract notion, it refers to the legitimation of any other form of capital perceived or recognised as valuable and is thus an endpoint of the successful accumulation of resources, for example, a professor’s title represents authority and commands respect. Symbolic capital draws on the others’ acknowledgement and therefore requires similar backgrounds and perceptions.

In sum, though the different forms of capital identified by Bourdieu draw on distinctive resources, they are often interchangeable. Importantly, all forms of capital imply inclusiveness and exclusiveness through connections with social affective hints. Threadgold (2020) suggests that Bourdieu develops the forms of capital in an affective way, noting that the activities and “affective properties and propensities” (p. 84) inherent to different types of capital create “sticky affinities” which divide groups. Also, applying Bourdieusian sociology in understanding affect as the theory of practice can be seen as “... an effort to sociologically account for aspects of power, values, morals” since “affect is impossible to explain without a sociological understanding of value and status” (p.8-9).

Bourdiesian sociology provides a practical framework to understand the value of LL in use and its role in producing and reproducing meanings and structures in public places. Numerous LL studies employ the Bourdieusian theory as a theoretical lens. For instance, Ben-Rafael et al., (2006) build analysis directly on Bourdieu’s theory of capitals to highlight LL as a symbolic construction of public place produced through patterned choices by actors, such as institutions, businesses, and individuals. Through examining language dominance from signage across sites in Israel, they identify three interacting determinants: rational considerations, identity projects, and power relations.

By treating language as a form of capital, the visibility of language in public places contributes to the reproduction of social stratification and political authority. Reite (2023) incorporates an intersubjective dimension of habitus to analyse how inequality emerges and is experienced in both material and non-material urban geographies. This study argues for relocating the central analytical lens from visibilities to invisibilities and absences such as embodied feeling, values, and judgements in urban space with an emphasis on the political economy of LL research. Shang (2024) examines the symbolic capital of language and scripts in refabricated Chinese historical streets in framing heritage, tourism, and commodification. Shang argues that traditionally styled Chinese

semiotic artefacts function have “authenticating capital” in legitimising a street as a heritage site and in reinvigorating it as a commercial marketplace through indexing history and materialising “ancient Chineseness”. This study further extends Bourdieusian sociology by addressing the inequalities of cultural authorisation, noting uneven distribution of access to and deployment of historical semiotic resources.

There has been much discussion and debate as to whether habitus can adequately account for contingent, interactional dimensions of agency and the processes through which meanings become socially legible. A long-running general critique brought up by King (2000) is that the concept of habitus conceptualises human agency as overly reproductive in a deterministic manner, leaving little room for variables such as reflexivity, sensitivity, and improvisation. Joseph (2020) suggests treating habitus as probabilistic rather than stable and making agency more empirically visible in analysing discourses and interactions.

While Bourdieusian theory provides a solid macro-frame for investigating distribution of social resources, Hanks (2005) notes that an explanation of how meanings and values become legible is under-specified. A strengthened Bourdieusian approach requires both a less rigid account of agency and complementary frameworks that clarify how value is semiotically produced and socially authorised.

3.6 LL theories: From linguistic to semiotic

3.6.1 A multimodality perspective

Multimodality was introduced to LL research to emphasise that public meaning-making goes beyond language in the strict and static sense and encompass discourse and multimodal semiosis more broadly (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Seargeant & Giaxoglou, 2020). The multimodal perspective offers crucial theoretical grounding for the present study in understanding signage both as an aggregation of multimodal resources (e.g.,

words, icons, pictures), and as an active actor within a broader multimodal environment, interacting with other spatial actors (e.g., people, space, infrastructures).

According to Jaworski and Thurlow's (2010) edited volume, which treats landscape as a dense semiotic environment where institutions and social actors use mixed multimodal forms (i.e. words, images, spatial practices) to create, circulate, negotiate, and dispute meanings, thus multimodality is seen as a fundamental aspect of communication in late-modern public life. Written language is rarely used alone to convey meaning in public spaces, instead, a variety of semiotic modes such as imagery, typography, layout, material surfaces, and spatial organisation interact to produce meanings. They present the semiotic landscape as a conceptual shift that centres the relationships between language, image, and space and characterise it broadly as public space shaped by visible inscriptions and intentional meaning-making.

The multimodal concept has significant implications for LL studies. It encourages going beyond visible measurements to look at how semiotic resources work together to create place narratives. Such expansion is frequently referred to as part of an expanded LL remit. Second, as Thurlow and Jaworski (2010) argue in their analysis of luxury tourism representations illustrating "linguascaping", multimodality broadens what counts as data and method in LL research. LL studies influenced by this approach are more likely to treat absence, salience, or "anti-communication" as significant semiotic phenomena in arranged environments, and to combine visual/social-semiotic tools with ethnographic attention to emplacement and practice.

One influential line of this collection appears on the discussion of urban commercial placemaking in later studies, which explicitly moves from a narrow "linguistic" focus to a broader "semiotic" lens to account for spatial design and materiality as part of meaning. For instance, Papen's (2012) study in Berlin insists that imagery and visual styling of text such as fonts and colours is not only decorative but also central to interpretation.

Multimodality significantly inspires studies on institutional and educational LL. Pesch's (2021) study in kindergarten positions early-childhood settings as multimodal landscapes, examining how multilingualism is curated through material displays and visual design and capturing how participation and learning is shaped. Fjeld and Giæver (2024) employ walking interviews with children to show how multimodal resources can actively invite or limit interaction and dialogue in Norwegian kindergartens. Jocun's (2021) institutional study at a Thai university uses a similar approach to investigate how university students interpret campus artefacts and spatial narratives as semiotic resources, extending a multimodal approach into higher education.

In Gottdiener's (2012) pointed review of Jaworski and Thurlow (2010)'s framework, he argues that the volume uses "semiotic" more as a broad cultural-studies label rather than as a tightly defined analytic approach. He suggests there is limited sustained semiotic analysis of how meaning is produced and organised, and that the collection does not always deliver on the methodological promises of its title. This criticism implies that a multimodal framework can remain more interpretive or agenda-setting than fully operational, and that clear procedures for identifying unit of analysis across modes are needed.

3.6.2 Assemblage

Jaworski and Thurlow's (2010) framework of multimodality pushed LL analysis beyond written words on signs toward situated semiotic action, Pennycook (2017) takes the next step by proposing the assemblage perspective. Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015) work on metrolingualism and spatial repertoires explains everyday urban practice through the interaction of activities, artefacts, and environments. Later, Pennycook (2017) advances the theory of assemblage to conceptualise the linguistic code in place as a dynamic, materially situated set of relations among diverse components such as people, spaces, artefacts, infrastructures, and other semiotic resources. On this account, meaning making happens through the dynamic coordination of these elements in

practice. Pennycook's (2017) theory frames assemblage as an analytical lens that foregrounds the co-presence and contingency of distinct trajectories intersecting through spatiotemporal linkages.

This framework displaces the idea of "language" as a bounded, pre-established system with a materially grounded, relational account of how communication is produced in practice. Pennycook (2017) casts this as treating language as something distributed across diverse social and physical environments, and inseparable from embodied experience and local ontologies. Within this treatment, language is something which comes into being through social action. The analytic gain of this view is a rescaling of sociolinguistic explanation away from codes toward what becomes possible when people, artefacts, infrastructures, linguistic resources, and cultures converge in situ, calling for attention to space, mobility, and distributed agency in meaning-making.

The uptake of assemblage in LL research is most visible in studies which move beyond counting languages on signs toward analysing how place is produced through reconfigurations of space, people, and resources. Biró (2022) demonstrates the move toward semiotic assemblage through demonstrating how meanings arise from the interplay of written texts on goods, multisensory experiences, non-linguistic resources, and spatial organisation in the investigation of the brand identity construction of an enterprise in Romania. Grounded in the specific socio-cultural context, Biró (2022) lists detailed multisensory resources such as the tune of Szekler folk songs and the smell of meat products, relating them to the commodification of cultural background. He carefully displays the interactions and effects generated by an assemblage in constructing a corporate identity and attracting customers. Yao and Gruba (2022) show the enactment of authority and social relations through semiotic assemblage by treating power as an effect of diverse interactions arranged in place, providing a methodological prompt to document how meaning and power relation are produced through materiality, contextualisation, and emplacement.

Assemblage is frequently employed by LL studies to capture temporality and mobility in places where the static inventory of semiotic landscapes is analytically insufficient. Gu (2023) compares the Covidscape across Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong, framing temporary public-health signs as layered multimodal assemblages within particular contexts of crisis communication and mobility regimes, highlighting features of ongoing reconfiguration of spaces. In a comparable vein, Urribarrí (2024) examines Venezuelan street protests through the lens of assemblage to address how diverse components and their interactions continually grouped and regrouped as protests unfolded. This study also demonstrates that messages in public space are produced through temporary and reconfigurable alignments of constituents of an assemblage, methodologically positioning assemblage as a way to capture instability and the movement of protests.

Literature also extends or helps legitimate the theoretical framework of assemblage. Tagg and Lyons (2021) build from this concept in their digital interaction study to address “repertoire assemblage”. Based on ethnographic analysis of WhatsApp and Viber exchanges between two UK-based women of Polish origin, they show that meaning is generated through repertoire assemblage. Participants jointly construct communicative resources in real time by combining language, emojis, images, and pre-set signs. This study contributes to understand how platform affordances and pre-programmed signs shape online communicative possibilities, extending analysis to broader lived, embodied places. Gurney and Demuro (2022) identify this framework as an expanding strand within multilingual and ontological turns, supporting relocating repertoires into dynamic interactions among places, people, and linguistic and semiotic resources rather than bounded linguistic entities. Their discussion helps clarifying the contribution of assemblage to sociolinguistic theory and method, while also noticing what assemblage thinking entails for language studies remains underdeveloped.

3.7 Summary

This chapter demonstrates how LL scholarship has moved from an initial focus on the presence and distribution of languages on public signage to broader perspectives that treat LL as an arena where social relations, authority, and belonging are produced and contested in everyday life, all aspects informs the analytical frameworks of the present study. In sum, early LL frameworks linked language choice, authorship, and functional categories to wider sociolinguistic layering, while later work reframes LL as involved in forming social relationships and regulating the public. In parallel, semiotic perspectives conceptualise the interpretation of LL as situated and material, emphasising how design, emplacement, and interaction make meanings in context. Multimodal perspectives build on this view by showing that signage communicates through other coordinated resources such as typography, colour, imagery, layout, and physical materials. More recent engagements with assemblage theory further extend this discussion by proposing place as dynamic configurations of people, signs, infrastructures, and spaces. Finally, the participation of affective regimes highlights that LL works not only through emplacement and visual design, but also through cultivating and managing expected collective feelings. The next chapter will address how earlier studies help this project to establish its methodology and introduce the core research design parts.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction and essential background information, situating the current study within the broader field of LL research and justifying its significance. Chapter 2 traces the historical development of empirical LL studies, and presents and evaluates research themes relevant to the contexts of the present study. Chapter 3 reviews major LL theoretical frameworks and builds the conceptual background guiding this study. In the present chapter, this study's methodology will be discussed in detail. Research questions will be introduced alongside theoretical underpinnings, research design, and methods. Methodological choices are discussed in relation to the study's research objectives, and procedures for ensuring the reliability and validity of the results are outlined.

4.2 Research questions

This research aims to present both a comprehensive overview and a nuanced interpretation of language landscapes within the public transportation system of Chongqing through a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative analysis covers fourteen transport hubs across six transport modes to offer a broad analytical lense. The qualitative analysis, by contrast, focuses on two representative sites to offer an in-depth examination of the role signage plays in the formation of functions in

Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station, and its interplay within affective regimes in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport under online and offline contexts as well as an ethnographic perspective. Towards this end, the study will investigate the following research questions:

- 1) What types of information are conveyed through the linguistic landscape of transport hubs in Chongqing, and what features or changes within transport hubs can be identified?
- 2) How does signage in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station contribute to the construction, organisation, and differentiation of social functions within a multifunctional large-scale railway hub?
- 3) What affective regimes are mobilised through the linguistic landscape of the Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, and what forms of capital (e.g. symbolic, cultural, economic) are invoked and negotiated in the semiotic construction of an international transport hub?

4.3 Conceptual framework

To address its research questions, this study will draw on four theoretical frameworks to develop an overall research structure design as the conceptual framework. These theoretical frameworks include geosemiotics by Scollon and Scollon (2003), assemblage by Pennycook (2017), affective regimes by Wee and Goh (2019), and

Bourdieuian sociology. Figure 4.1 below explains the present study’s conceptual framework:

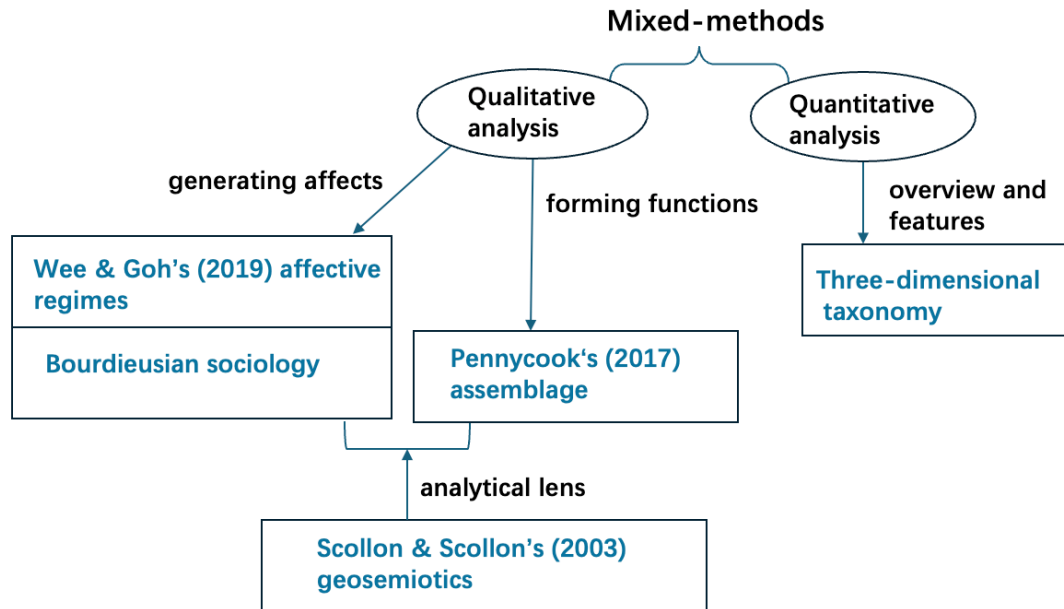


Figure 4. 1: The conceptual framework of this study

Table 4.1 below displays the study’s analytical framework which explains how the selected theoretical frameworks are applied to my own data in order to answer the research questions:

Table 4. 1: The analytical framework of this study

Research Question 1:	What types of information are conveyed through the linguistic landscape of transport hubs in Chongqing, and what features or changes within transport hubs can be identified?
Data:	All photographic data
Theory(s) and method(s):	This question addresses detailed presentations and an overall summary of collected signs. Developing a three-dimensional taxonomy informed by previous studies, this study employs quantitative analysis, categorising its whole dataset according to three criteria to ensure a comprehensive display of numeric results.

	This question also aims to probe feature and changes in Chongqing's public transport hubs by comparing and contrasting results across sites.
Research Question 2:	How does signage in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station contribute to the construction, organisation, and differentiation of social functions within a multifunctional large-scale railway hub?
Data:	Photographic data from Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station
Theory(s) and method(s):	The second question delves into the role of signage in forming specific social functions within a large-scale public transport hub. By employing Pennycook's (2017) concept of assemblage and treating Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station as a semiotic assemblage of signage, people, space, infrastructures, and other semiotic resources, inquiry inspired by this question divides the research site into different functional zones, examining the interplay of components in each zone. LL types and their contents are examined with a focus on how signage contributes to the broader social functions of space. Methodologically, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics provides an analytical lens for interpreting interactions through visual design, interaction order, and emplacement.
Research Question 3:	What affective regimes are mobilised through the linguistic landscape of the Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, and what forms of capital (i.e. symbolic, cultural, economic, social) are invoked and negotiated in the semiotic construction of an international transport hub?

Data:	Photographic data from Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, online public posts from Weibo
Theory(s) and method(s):	This question investigates the subtle relationship between signage and passengers' affective responses. The theory of affective regimes by Wee and Goh (2019) and Bourdieusian sociology, especially the notion of capital, are employed as theoretical frameworks for this qualitative analysis. Analyses allow for a nuanced interpretation of signs' roles in shaping passengers' affective experiences and highlighting diverse capitals in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, shedding light on the symbolic function of LL in place-making.

In Chapter 3, key theories were introduced with their central concepts and main contributions to the scholarship. The following sections will critically evaluate the four main theories introduced in this section and explain their adaptation and application to the present research.

4.3.1 Quantitative analysis

In analysing the main function and general features of LLs in research areas, with an overview of the classification and distribution of LLs at transportation hubs in Chongqing, this study adopts a quantitative approach. The aim of this section is to introduce and evaluate the quantitative analytical framework used in this thesis. To fulfill this research objective, this study develops an original taxonomy informed by coding schemes proposed in earlier LL studies.

One influential framework is Spolsky and Cooper's (1991) taxonomy, which positions "building signs and commemorative plaques on the symbolic end, warning notices and informative signs on the informative end" (Spolsky, 2008, p. 34). Spolsky and Cooper (1991) lay out eight categories of signs based on content and function (see

Section 2.2). This taxonomy provides a practical method to classify and interpret quantitative data and build a connection between identified LL clusters and the two major functions of signs: information and symbolic. It also enables researchers to examine LLs through different perspectives by considering the distribution or power relation of clusters (Parra, 2022).

In light of later scholarship’s growing attention to language varieties (e.g., Bagna & Barni, 2008; Savela, 2018) and the emergence of diverse sign presentation formats as a salient feature of contemporary urban life (e.g., Amos, 2019), this study is also inspired to encompass the languages on signage and the formats of signage in building up the coding scheme.

Taken together, and to make sure identified categories can accurately reflect LLs at specific research sites, this study develops a taxonomy comprising three classification criteria in alignment with the distinctive context of transportation hubs in Chongqing: function and content, format, and language. This original three meta-type criteria and detailed subcategories used in this study are listed in the Table 4.2 below:

Table 4. 2: Taxonomy of this study

A. by function and content	B. by format	C. by language
1. Notices	1. Physical signs	1. Chinese-only signs
2. Directional signs	2. QR codes	2. English-inclusive signs
3. Advertising signs		
4. COVID-19 signs		
5. Public welfare signs		

However, relying solely on quantitative analysis in LL research tends to confine inquiry to broad descriptions and general trends, making it difficult to closely observe and meaningfully interpret underlying phenomena. As a result, quantitative studies

often offer only a partial picture, while the complex interactions between LLs, society, and individuals remain insufficiently explored (Lyons, 2020). The trend of moving from quantitative approaches to ethnographic methods demonstrates the necessity of involving multi-dimensional methods and analysis (Banda and Jimaima 2015; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010; Malinowski 2010; Kallen 2010). Besides, the mixed-methods approach has been well presented in a number of existing studies (e.g. Backhaus 2006; Huebner 2006; Vandembroucke 2016), highlighting the advantage of using ethnographic methodology with some level of quantification in understanding the sophisticated connotations behind LLs. Thus, to reach a deeper exploration of LL and its social significance, this study argues that a mixed-methods approach would be more adequate than applying a single method for investigating LLs in Chongqing.

4.3.2 Qualitative analysis

The inclusion of quantitative methods in this research is indispensable, as they provide a comprehensive overview of the predominant characteristics of signage across diverse public transportation hubs. At the same time, this study incorporates four qualitative theoretical frameworks: geosemiotics, assemblage theory, affective regimes, and Bourdieusian sociology to enable more nuanced interpretation. The combination of different qualitative lenses can serve to construct a comprehensive understanding of the role of signage in place-making. In this section, I will introduce the four qualitative theoretical frameworks in detail.

Geosemiotics

In this study, geosemiotics is a vital analytical framework as it will be employed to address research question 2 and 3. Basic features of geosemiotic theory were presented in Chapter 3 (see Chapter 3 for full discussions). The key takeaway is that by looking at visual semiotics, place semiotics, and interaction order, geosemiotics offers guidance to the present study to explore how specific semiotic elements (e.g. text, colour, font, material) display the function of a sign in place-making and

generate readers' affective responses. The framework of geosemiotic also enables further explanation for comparative purposes during the analysing process.

In an example of a geosemiotic analysis of an LL within China, Wang's (2021) study employed a geosemiotic framework in analysing multilingual signs in Xi'an. He investigated code preference, inscription, and emplacement, drawing the conclusion that the linguistic context of the city is still "being cosmopolitanised" (p. 231) and signage regulations are needed. Yet this analysis did not consider in-depth interactions between multilingual signage and language policy of Xi'an. Shortcomings such as this have led some critics to suggest that geosemiotics places too much emphasis on semiotic elements in shaping our understanding of space, potentially overlooking other factors that contribute to spatial meaning, such as social practices, material conditions, or lived experiences. Therefore, the theoretical framework of geosemiotics is employed as a primary analytical lens complemented by other three qualitative frameworks: assemblage, affective regimes, and Bourdieusian sociology.

Assemblage

This framework is employed to answer research question 2. Pennycook's (2017) concept of assemblage considers place-making to be a set of relationships and interplays among components including signage, people, space, and other objects and semiotic resources within a site. This perspective maps interactions in practice toward a multidimensional interpretation of the making of meanings and actions in place. As a component of an assemblage, signage cannot be read as a bounded and fixed system from a solidary lens but has to be understood through its performances in dynamic and reconfigurable relationships with other agencies. Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics framework helps in demonstrating how signage contributes to the set of relationships that comprise an assemblage.

Affective Regimes

Wee and Goh's (2019) concept of an affective regime, which refers to "the set of conditions that govern with varying degrees of hegemonic status the ways in which particular kinds of affect can be appropriately materialised in the context of a given site" (p. 109), investigates the ambience or atmosphere that languages and signs contribute to a space, is employed to address research question 3.

As discussed in Chapter 3, affective regimes operate at the level of the site, where group members' feelings (e.g., hospitality, nostalgia, romance) are expected to conform to environmentally oriented "display rules." This perspective helps distinguish transport hubs from other public spaces, as well as the signage within them from signage found elsewhere. In this context, a key symbolic function of signage is to elicit passengers' affective responses in institutionally expected ways. This function also underpins the regulatory role of transport hubs.

Bourdieuian sociology

This study adopts a Bourdieusian sociological framework to deepen the analysis of affective regimes at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport. By conceptualising the airport as a structured field with specific rules, resources, and power relations, the study uses the concept of habitus to explain how expected affects emerge from passengers' durable, embodied dispositions shaped by their social trajectories. In addition, a Bourdieusian lens helps identify how different forms of capital (i.e., economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) are reproduced through emotional discipline. In the process, the interpretation of institutionally regulated affects is further enhanced by being aligned with the legitimised ways of using and inhabiting public space.

4.4 Research design

4.4.1 Research sites

An objective of this study is to display an overview of LLs in public transport hubs in Chongqing. Factors considered when selecting sites include passenger flow, geography, and a comprehensive consideration of involving both common and uncommon transportation means. The Figure 4.2 shows an overview of Chongqing and its terrain, the central urban area is marked within the red circle.

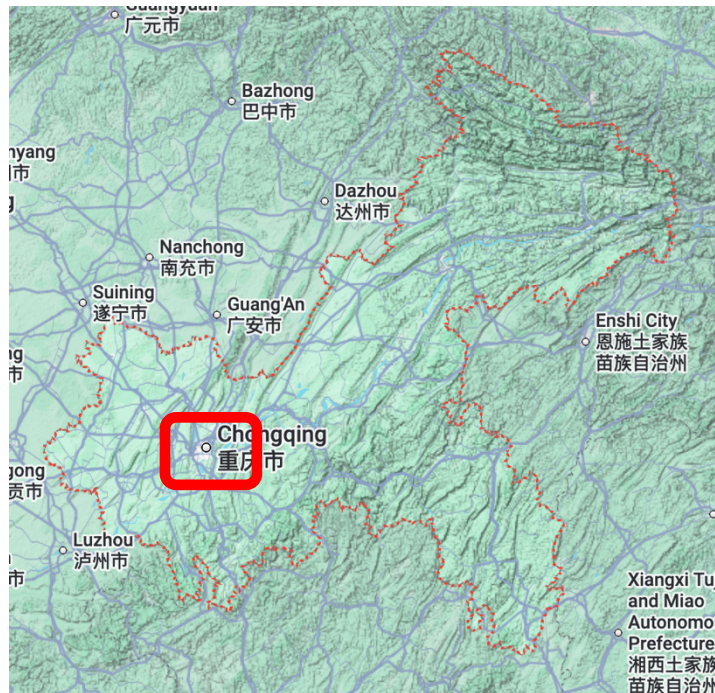


Figure 4. 2: The map of Chongqing¹³

As a municipality, Chongqing covers an extensive area (as noted in Chapter 2). The main urban area is located slightly to the west of the municipality's centre and occupies only a small portion of the whole (9 out of the 38 districts). However, this main urban area contains all of Chongqing's transport hubs and carries the vast majority of the city's traffic capacity.

Following Buchstaller and Alvanides' (2025) emphasis on the importance of careful methodological decision-making in site selection, sampling, documentation, coding, and spatial interpretation, this study selected fourteen public transport hubs as

¹³ From Google Maps:
<https://www.google.com/maps/place/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E9%87%8D%E5%BA%86%E5%B8%82/@29.5567829,106.4421359,11.52z/data=!4m6!3m5!1s0x369334baf3e64f43:0xde9f8616dc88b321!8m2!3d29.5656843!4d106.5511838!16zL20vMDE3MjM2!5m1!1e4?entry=tту&ep=EgoyMDI2MDIxOC4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D>

research sites. This selection was designed to fulfil the study’s research objectives and to enable a representative and comprehensive interpretation of Chongqing’s linguistic landscape. The Figure 4.3 displays the location of every research site on the map of the main urban area. The following sections will introduce each site as well as its significance as a transport hub in Chongqing.

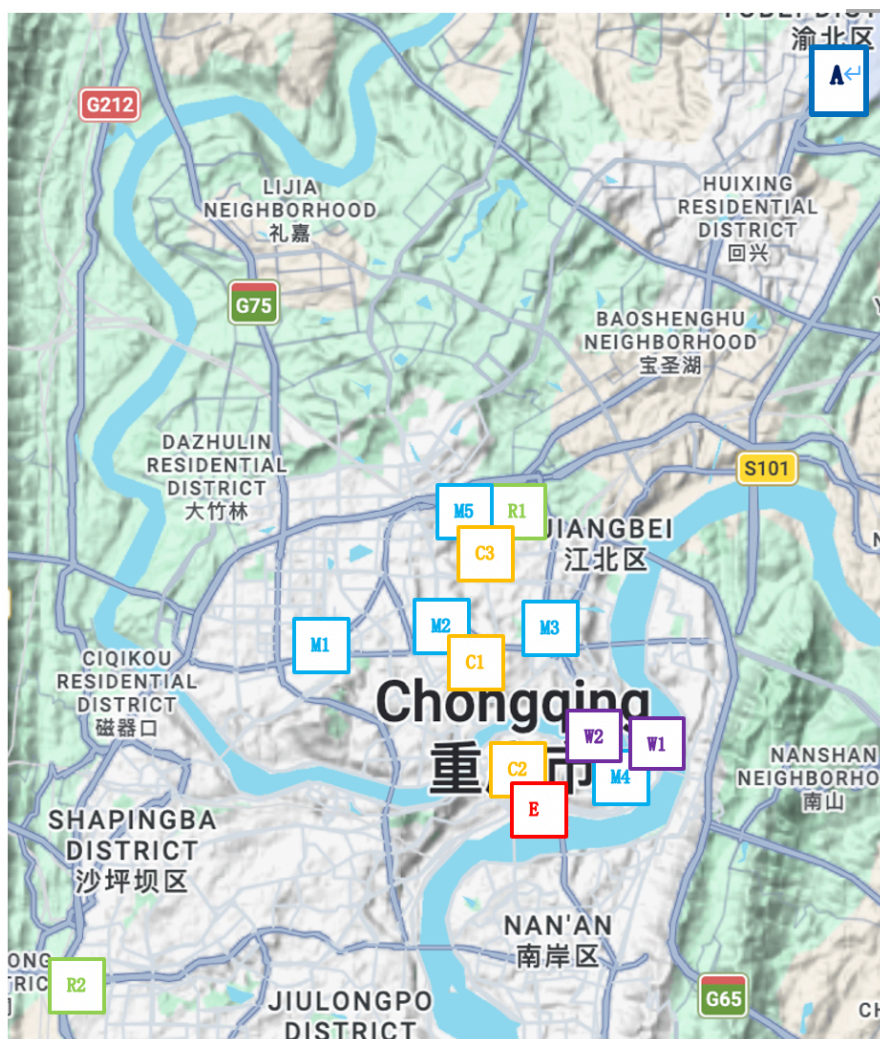


Figure 4. 3: Location of research sites

One airport: Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport

Jiangbei International Airport in Chongqing (“A” in Figure 4.3) is a key aviation hub in Southwest China and plays a vital role in the region’s transportation and economy. In 2022, it was the second-busiest airport in Mainland China by passenger traffic¹⁴.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.cqa.cn/jbjc/150/112.shtml>

Terminal 2 has a capacity of handling 37 million passengers annually, while Terminal 3A can handle 45 million passengers each year. In 2025, the annual passenger throughput has exceeded 50 million, brought about an increase of approximately 90 billion yuan in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Chongqing¹⁵. As Terminal 3B was still under construction during the period of data collection and did not enter operation until April 2025, it was excluded from the present study.

The significance of CKG extends beyond its transportation capabilities. The airport connects over 300 domestic and international destinations, making it one of the five largest airports in Southwest China to engage in foreign exchanges. The airport has also established itself as an international route network leader, with connections to five continents. The airport's growth is a part of Chongqing's strategy to develop its aviation industry significantly and to become a major international air hub by 2030¹⁶. As an integral part of the Chongqing Airport Economic Demonstration Zone, CKG contributes substantially to the region's GDP, with a future target of 100 billion yuan¹⁷.

Two high-speed railway stations: Chongqing West High-speed Railway Station, Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station (“R1” in Figure 4.3), located in the Yubei District¹⁸, is the busiest of three Chongqing's railway stations (Chongqing North, Chongqing West, and Chongqing East). It handles a variety of train services, including high-speed trains (CRH), bullet trains, and regular trains, providing well-connected routes to popular tourist cities such as Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, and more.

¹⁵ Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1853012488918609681&wfr=spider&for=pc>

¹⁶ Source: https://www.cq.gov.cn/ywdt/jrcq/202601/t20260110_15305227.html

¹⁷ Source: <https://cq.ifeng.com/c/8h6aapQJ4td>

¹⁸ Was renamed and incorporated into the 'Liangjiang New Area' in 2026. Source: <https://www.xinhuanet.com/20260125/c6271c60eeb641be811d9d41293f9efe/c.html>

Chongqing West High-speed Railway Station (“R2” in Figure 4.3), which started operations in early 2018, is one of the largest railway stations in Western China¹⁹. It functions as a crucial transportation hub connecting Chongqing to various destinations across southwestern and northwestern China. The station has a significant layout that includes multiple floors for departures, arrivals, waiting halls, and metro access to additional transportation modes like metro services. The establishment of Chongqing West High-speed Railway Station has enhanced the connectivity of Chongqing with other major cities and regions, contributing to the city’s role as a pivotal transportation node in Western China.

Both Chongqing West and North High-speed Railway Stations are integral components of Chongqing’s public transportation system, offering extensive rail services that promote regional connectivity, economic development, and ease of movement for passengers within and beyond the municipality.

Five metro stations: Xiaoshizi, Hongqihegou, Ranjiaba, Wulidian, and Chongqing North Station South Square

Chongqing’s metro system began operating in 2005 and serves the transportation needs of the city’s central business and entertainment areas as well as inner suburbs. By the end of 2025, the Chongqing Railway Transit (CRT) had thirteen lines with a total track length of over 582 kilometres²⁰. The system includes both conventional heavy-rail metro lines and high-capacity monorails. Due to the mountainous terrain of Chongqing, which is densely populated with multiple river valleys, two lines utilise heavy-monorail technology which allows them to handle steep grades and tight curves effectively. The monorail lines are not only the longest in the world but also the busiest, with Line 3 being the world’s busiest single monorail line²¹. The system

¹⁹ Source: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%87%8D%E5%BA%86%E8%A5%BF%E7%AB%99/7357840>

²⁰ Source: https://zfcxjw.cq.gov.cn/zwxw_166/zwyw/202510/t20251016_15088175.html

²¹ Source: <https://www.cqmetro.cn/gdsh/app/2024/2/10/2169415.shtml>

includes impressive infrastructures with world-class awards²², such as the world's highest metro-only bridge and the world's deepest metro station.

In this study, five metro stations are selected as research sites: Ranjiaba (“M1” in Figure 4.3), Hongqihegou (“M2” in Figure 4.3), Wulidian (“M3” in Figure 4.3), Xiaoshizi (“M4” in Figure 4.3), and Chongqing North Station South Square (“M5” in Figure 4.3). These sites are both interchange stations for at least two lines, and the busiest stations in the districts to which they belong.

Two wharfs: Hongyadong and Chaotianmen

Water transport in Chongqing has played a significant role in the history of the city. Chaotianmen Wharf (“W1” in Figure 4.3) and Hongyadong Wharf (“W2” in Figure 4.3) are two famous wharfs in the downtown area of Chongqing, connecting various forms of water-based and land-based transport, and are key to both the daily commutes of locals and the exploration of the city by tourists.

Chaotianmen Wharf is located at the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers, making it a pivotal point in Chongqing's nautical transportation network. It is one of the busiest ports in the region and serves as a major gateway for river cruises that travel through the scenic Three Gorges toward the massive Three Gorges Dam. The wharf is not just a departure point for long-distance travel; it is also used for shorter river crossings and sightseeing trips that offer views of Chongqing's skyline and the surrounding mountainous landscape.

Hongyadong Wharf, on the other hand, is famed for its traditional stilted architecture that hangs over the riverside, a style reminiscent of ancient Chinese buildings and a symbol of the city. This area combines cultural experiences with transportation functions, offering a range of dining, shopping, and entertainment options that showcase Chongqing's unique local culture and cuisine.

²² Source: https://www.cq.gov.cn/zwgk/zfxgkml/zdlyxxgk/jt/jtzc/202511/t20251111_15154531.html

Both Chaotianmen and Hongyadong Wharfs are more than just transit points; they are lively, multifaceted areas that reflect the intersection of Chongqing's past and present. They are critical to the city's infrastructure, supporting the movement of people and goods, and contributing to the local economy. For tourists, they provide a gateway to Chongqing's historical and cultural landscapes, offering a glimpse into the city's soul.

Three coach stations: Chongqing Coach Station, Hongqihegou Coach Station, Chongqing North Station South Square Coach Station

The Chongqing Coach Station ("C2" in Figure 4.3) is a major transportation hub in the city of Chongqing put into use in 1995. It is an essential terminal for long-distance bus services connecting Chongqing with other cities and provinces across China. The station often serves as a starting point for travellers heading to tourist destinations within the region.

Hongqihegou Coach Station ("C1" in Figure 4.3) is another significant long-distance bus station in Chongqing, which was built in 1990. Positioned in the centre of Jiangbei District²³, it facilitates travel to and from suburban and rural areas, as well as to other major urban centres. This station is known for its connectivity to the metro system, allowing for easy transfers between long-distance buses and urban public transit.

The Chongqing North Station South Square Coach Station ("C3" in Figure 4.3) is located near the south square of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station in the Longtousi area. The station was originally named Longtousi Long-Distance Coach Station and was put into operation in 2008, at which time it was the largest long-distance passenger transport hub in Chongqing. Following the completion of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station, it was renamed as Chongqing North Station South Square Coach Station in 2016, serving as an important link for

²³ Was renamed and incorporated into the 'Liangjiang New Area' in 2026. Source: <https://www.xinhuanet.com/20260125/c6271c60eeb641be811d9d41293f9efe/c.html>

travellers transferring between rail and road transportation systems. It accommodates a variety of bus services, including intercity and regional buses. Its proximity to the railway station makes it convenient for passengers who need to switch between train and bus to continue their journeys.

One escalator station: the Crown Escalator Station

The Crown Escalator (“E” in Figure 4.3) plays a crucial role in the city’s public transportation network due to the region’s mountainous topography. Completed in 1996, this escalator was the highest single-grading escalator in Asia at the time of its construction. It is currently the third highest in Asia and remains the longest in China²⁴. The escalator spans 112 meters in length, 1.3 meters in width, and has a vertical height of about 53 meters, connecting the Chongqing Railway Station²⁵ to the Lianglukou Metro Station at the urban central area.

Not only does the Crown Escalator serve a practical purpose in providing a rapid connection between key transportation nodes in Chongqing, but it is also an attraction for tourists due to its unique characteristics and the impressive engineering required to integrate such a structure within the city’s hilly urban environment. The escalator has become a part of the city’s identity, offering a quick and convenient commute for residents and a unique experience for visitors. It takes approximately 2.5 minutes to travel from one end to the other and can carry up to 13,500 passengers per hour. The Crown Escalator is symbolic of how Chongqing has adapted to its geographical challenges and showcases the city’s innovative approaches to transportation, contributing to its growing popularity as a tourist destination.

4.4.2 Data collection and management

²⁴

Source: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%9A%87%E5%86%A0%E5%A4%A7%E6%89%B6%E6%A2%AF/1238565>

²⁵ this station was decommissioned in 2022.

Data were collected during three fieldwork periods: December 2022, July 2023, and December 2023. An iPhone 13 was used as the primary recording device. The dataset includes all forms of signage that contributed to visual communication within the selected sites, encompassing linguistic and non-linguistic signs, as well as both physical and digital displays across a range of materials and formats.

The default protocol was to photograph each sign front-on to maximise legibility and enable accurate transcription and analysis. Where front-on photography was not feasible, most commonly for very large signs, overhead installations, or signs obstructed by the built environment, video recording was used to capture the sign and its spatial context more comprehensively.

To complement the fieldwork data, the study also incorporated relevant secondary materials, including Weibo public posts, official websites, official documents and laws. These sources were used to supplement the primary dataset by adding contextual information (e.g., timing, public communication framing, or implementation details) that was not always available from on-site documentation alone.

A key set of time points to note is that the first round of data collection took place when China fully lifted its COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, the first dataset captures the transition from the during-COVID period to the post-COVID period. Although mandatory measures were no longer in place, most public areas in Chongqing in 2023 still displayed signs encouraging practices such as wearing masks and keeping social distance. Related signage could still be found during the second round of data collection, but by the third round almost all had been removed. Therefore, in this study, the definition and use of “post-COVID” refer to the period covered by the first and second rounds of data collection, December 2022 to July 2023.

During on-site data collection, the researcher adopted a methodologically informed approach, guided by a set of methodological choices: which semiotic elements should be included or excluded; what vantage point would best capture each sign's content and salient design features; whether panoramic or wider-angle images were needed to document the sign's spatial embedding; and how the recording procedure could minimise omissions of potentially consequential signage.

A major operational constraint in transport hubs was heavy passenger traffic, which increased the likelihood of incomplete or blurred captures. Although signs were photographed from positions intended to be unobstructed, constant pedestrian movement frequently interfered with visibility. To mitigate this, some signs were re-photographed multiple times and, where necessary, from different angles to secure a legible record.

Photographic data were transferred from the phone to a laptop and then organised into folders according to preliminary sign classifications. Low-quality images (e.g., blurred, occluded, or poorly framed) and files unrelated to the study were removed. Only photographs that met predefined inclusion criteria, most importantly, capturing the entire sign and rendering its content legible were retained. The retained images were then coded and assigned to the modified taxonomy clusters. Adobe Bridge 2024 was used to manage the dataset, including file naming, classification, and archiving. All curated data were stored securely in OneDrive to maintain a centralised, backed-up repository.

The following section reviews and exemplifies the raw dataset and outlines the selection criteria applied to ensure that the analytic corpus comprises only the clearest and most relevant representations.

4.4.3 Taxonomy of this study

Table 4.3 below explains the three-dimensional taxonomy with detailed definition and concrete photo examples.

Table 4. 3: Definition and example of taxonomy

Taxonomy	Definition	Example
By function and content		
Directional signs	Signs guiding passenger movement, navigation, and spatial orientation.	 <p>The first example is a large, vertical passenger flow map for the Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport. It features a stylized airplane icon at the top and a color-coded layout of terminal areas (A through T) across multiple floors (2F, MF, 1F, -1F, -2F). A legend at the bottom identifies symbols for location, ticket gates, parking, escalators, elevators, and restrooms.</p> <p>The second example is a transfer sign for a subway station. It uses icons and text to indicate directions for transferring between Line 6 (Teayuan direction), Line 5 (Yuegang North Road direction), Line 6 (Beibei direction), and the Loop Line (Loop Line).</p>


<p>Advertising signs</p>	<p>Signs promoting commercial products, services, brands, tourism, businesses, or consumption-oriented activities.</p>	
<p>Notices</p>	<p>Signs communicating specific information, requirements, reminders, warnings, or announcements to provide information, regulate behaviour, explain procedures.</p>	
<p>Notices</p>	<p>Signs communicating specific information, requirements, reminders, warnings, or announcements to provide information, regulate behaviour, explain procedures.</p>	



Public welfare signs

Signs promoting public values, civic morality, social responsibility, environmental awareness, public health, or ideological messages.






<p>Covid-19 signs</p>	<p>Signs specifically related to pandemic prevention, health monitoring, vaccination, testing, mask-wearing, social distancing, and other Covid-19 related public health measure.</p>	 <p>The top sign is a poster titled '老年人接种 全家人安心' (Elderly Vaccination, Family安心). It features a smiling elderly man in a grey cardigan. A speech bubble next to him says: '老年人接种新冠疫苗, 可有效降低感染后的重症风险。' (Elderly vaccination with COVID-19 vaccine can effectively reduce the risk of severe illness after infection.)</p> <p>The bottom sign is a yellow rectangular sign with a key icon in the top left corner. It contains the following text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 温馨提示 (Warm Reminder) 疫情期间 (During the epidemic) 此电梯不停靠1F (This elevator does not stop at 1F) During the COVID-19 pandemic This elevator does not stop at 1F 前往2号门旁乘坐电梯 (Proceed to Exit NO.2 and take the elevator) Proceed to Exit NO.2 and take the elevator A black arrow points to the left at the bottom of the sign. </p>
<p>By format</p>		

Physical signs

Signs placed in the built environment and can be read without requiring access to a digital device.



<p>QR codes</p>	<p>Machine-readable visual codes displayed on physical surfaces that connect readers to online information or services through scanning.</p>	 
<p>By language</p>		
<p>Chinese-only signs</p>	<p>Chinese is the only language on signs. Including Simplified Chinese characters, Traditional Chinese characters, and Pinyin.</p>	

		
<p>English-inclusive signs</p>	<p>English is included on signs. Including English-only and bi/multilingual signs.</p>	 
<p>Excluded signs</p>		

Product labels	Products sold at at selected research sites, e.g. food, drink, clothing, etc.	
Personal items	Individual belongings appearing in collected photos.	
Price tags	Signs indicating the specific price of a product.	

4.4.4 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

In this study, the researcher’s embodied engagement with the signage during walking and data collection is treated as an important source of qualitative insight. The analysis therefore does not approach signs as detached, fixed, or isolated objects, but examines how they are encountered in movement and how they interact with other semiotic resources, spatial arrangements, material objects, and social activities on site. This methodological orientation is grounded in ethnographic LL research, where the participant’s situated experience is central to understanding how public signs become meaningful in practice (e.g., Stroud & Jegels, 2014; Shaikjee et al., 2024).

Such a mobile and embodied approach is well established in recent LL studies. Lou (2017), for example, combines pre- and post-walk interviews, participant observation, video recording, and fieldnotes to trace embodied movement and activity across three Hong Kong markets. Similarly, Liao et al. (2025) employ a “walking-in-the-LL” methodology in Edinburgh to examine how multilingual signs are encountered by moving bodies and how meanings are produced through affective and spatial practices. These studies demonstrate that walking, observing, pausing, and moving through public space are not merely practical procedures for collecting data; they are also analytical practices that reveal how signs are noticed, interpreted, and connected to place-based experience.

Therefore, Chapters 6 and 7 incorporate the researcher’s embodied observations and experiences alongside the study’s analytical frameworks. This approach strengthens the qualitative analysis by allowing the study to account not only for what signs display, but also for how they are positioned, encountered, and interpreted within the lived spatial environment.

4.4.5 Language policies and regulations

In an effort to enhance discussion and support data collection, I also examined the language policies, government websites (e.g. Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China²⁶; Chongqing Municipal Education Commission²⁷), and other documentary sources (e.g. *Regulations of Chongqing on the Administration of news media advertising*). Chongqing, a cosmopolitan city, is predominantly populated by the Han ethnic group, which constitutes 93.23% of its population, while the remaining 6.77% comprises ethnic minorities, including the Tu and Miao peoples. According to *Language Atlas of China*²⁸ (2012), Chongqing is situated within the Southwest

²⁶ <http://www.moe.gov.cn/>

²⁷ http://jw.cq.gov.cn/zwgk_209/wap.html

²⁸ 中国社会科学院语言研究所, 中国社会科学院民族学与人类学研究所, & 香港城市大学语言资讯科学研究中心 (编). (2012). *中国语言地图集 (第2版): 汉语方言卷 (第1版)*. 商务印书馆.

Mandarin-speaking zone, and while it has a distinct local dialect, written Chinese is predominantly Simplified Chinese characters. Notably, Chongqing does not legislate an independent language policy; rather, it adheres to the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language (2000)*²⁹. The official language for both spoken and written communication in Chongqing is Mandarin, which is also the mandated language for public signage within the PRC.

Regulations on public signage are discussed in many official documents. In each *Annual Key Points of the Department of Language Application Management of the Ministry of Education*³⁰, the necessity to improve language service capacity and regulating the social application of languages in not only a physical context, but also within the online environment has been emphasised. For example, a key point in 2019³¹ is:

“Carry out the standardization of language and script use across industries. Conduct monitoring of language use in key sectors. Improve coordination mechanisms for law-based administration and enforcement oversight of language and script affairs. Develop standards for language and script standardization in the cultural, tourism, and healthcare sectors; formulate a recommended list of “positive-energy” expressions for online communication; and strengthen governance of micro-language dissemination. Provide language services to meet the needs of special population groups.”

The law and annual reports also promote the appearance of multiple languages and the process of internationalisation. Accordingly, there are detailed regulation rules and guidelines for foreign language translations. The Table 4.4 lists official documents and websites the present study refers.

²⁹ 教育部. (2000). *中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法*.

https://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_zcfg/zcfg_jyf1/202204/t20220421_620290.html

³⁰ Source: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A19/>

³¹ Source: http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A18/tongzhi/201901/t20190115_366996.html

Table 4. 4: Referenced official websites and documents

Websites:
Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China http://www.moe.gov.cn/
Chongqing Municipal Education Commission http://jw.cq.gov.cn/
National Language Work Committee http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sy/China_Language/
Chongqing Municipal People’s Government https://admin.cq.gov.cn/
Annual key points of the Department of Language Application Management of the Ministry of Education https://so.moe.gov.cn/s?qt=%E8%AF%AD%E8%A8%80%E6%96%87%E5%AD%97%E5%BA%94%E7%94%A8%E5%B7%A5%E4%BD%9C%E8%A6%81%E7%82%B9&siteCode=bm05000001&tab=all&toolsStatus=1
Key points of language work in Chongqing http://jw.cq.gov.cn/jygz/yywzgz/wap.html
《中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法》 <i>the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language</i> http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_zcfg/zcfg_jyfl/202204/t20220421_620290.html
《公共服务领域英文译写规范 第1部分：通则》 <i>English Translation and Writing Specifications for the Public Service Sector, Part 1: General Principles</i> http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/ziliao/A19/201001/t20100115_75606.html
《重庆市户外招牌管理办法》 <i>Chongqing Municipal Measures for the Administration of Outdoor Signboards</i> https://cgj.cq.gov.cn/zwgk_173/fdzdgknr/lzyj/zffz/202602/t20260213_15441942.htm ↓

4.5 Summary

This section focuses on the research design and analytical procedures of this study, encompassing the vital theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2 and 3, including Scollon and Scollon's concept of geosemiotics (2003), Pennycook’s (2017) assemblage, Wee and Goh’s (2019) affective regime, and Bourdieusian sociology. It

expounds upon fundamental concepts and practical applications within the realm of research while critically addressing inherent limitations. This chapter also substantiates modifications to these frameworks implemented in the present study.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach with quantitative and qualitative analyses, and online and offline data sources. In light of established theoretical frameworks, this study refines the categorisation from previous studies and develops a three-dimensional taxonomy: by function and content, by format, and by language. These criteria aim to provide a panoramic view of LL in Chongqing's public transport hubs, and capture the dynamic nature of both signage and transport hubs. In the qualitative analysis, the geosemiotic approach is used to provide a systematic analytical framework. This study conceptualises Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station as an assemblage in order to examine how signage interacts with other resources to produce multiple social functions within different zones. It then combines the frameworks of affective regimes and Bourdieusian sociology, as well as both offline and online data, to explain how the LL contributes to the production of expected affective experiences in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport within Chongqing's specific cultural and historical context. The next chapter presents the results and findings of the quantitative analysis.

Chapter 5

A Panoramic View of the Linguistic Landscape of Chongqing's Public Transport Hubs

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 provided a thorough review of this study's methodology, introduced theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and research design. Chapter 5 offers a quantitative analysis of 14 transport hubs across six modes of transport based on a three-dimensional taxonomy. The chapter presents numeric results from the modified taxonomy, which classifies signs by function and content, format, and languages. Cross-sites comparison is then applied, and significant results and findings highlighted. Lastly, this chapter summarises identified features and changes within transport hubs to gain an overview of the LL in public transport spaces in Chongqing.

5.2 Signs by function and content

Photo data collection took place in December 2022, July 2023, and December 2023. After classifying data according to the criteria described in Chapter 4, this study collected in total 1,852 photos from six types of transport hubs. QR codes were not counted into the sum amount because each QR code was displayed on a physical sign already categorised. Signs with QR codes will be discussed as the separate section 5.4.

To allow for a more concise presentation, the names of transport hubs are here shortened when appearing in tables and charts. The Jiangbei International Airport is henceforth referred to simply as “Airport”; the Crown Escalator as “Escalator”; the Hongyadong wharf and Chaotianmen wharf as “Two Wharfs”; the Chongqing North and Chongqing West high-speed railway stations as “Two Railways”; the Hongqihegou, Chongqing North Station South Square, and Chongqing coach stations as “Three Coaches”; and the five metro stations: Hongqihegou, Xiaoshizi, Wulidian, Ranjiaba, Chongqing North Station South Square are henceforth referred to as “Five Metros”.

This section presents and discusses signs classified by functions and contents.

When it comes to counting, the definition and boundary of the unit of analysis in LL research are often difficult to determine. Following Ben-Rafael’s (2008) proposal to approach the linguistic landscape as a gestalt and focus on what can be observed within a single field of view, and Gorter and Cenoz’s (2025) suggestion of prioritising the goal of investigation and research question, in this study, a physical sign that contains multiple smaller elements is counted as one analytical unit. The categorisation of such a sign is based on its primary function. For example, Figure 5.14 shows a store directory map that includes several smaller semiotic units, such as logos and brand names. However, since these elements are integrated within one “spatially definable frame” (Backhaus, 2006), and since the primary function of the sign as a whole is navigational, it is coded as one directional sign. Table 5.1 displays the specific number of photos collected in each field site.

Table 5. 1: Number of signs by function and content

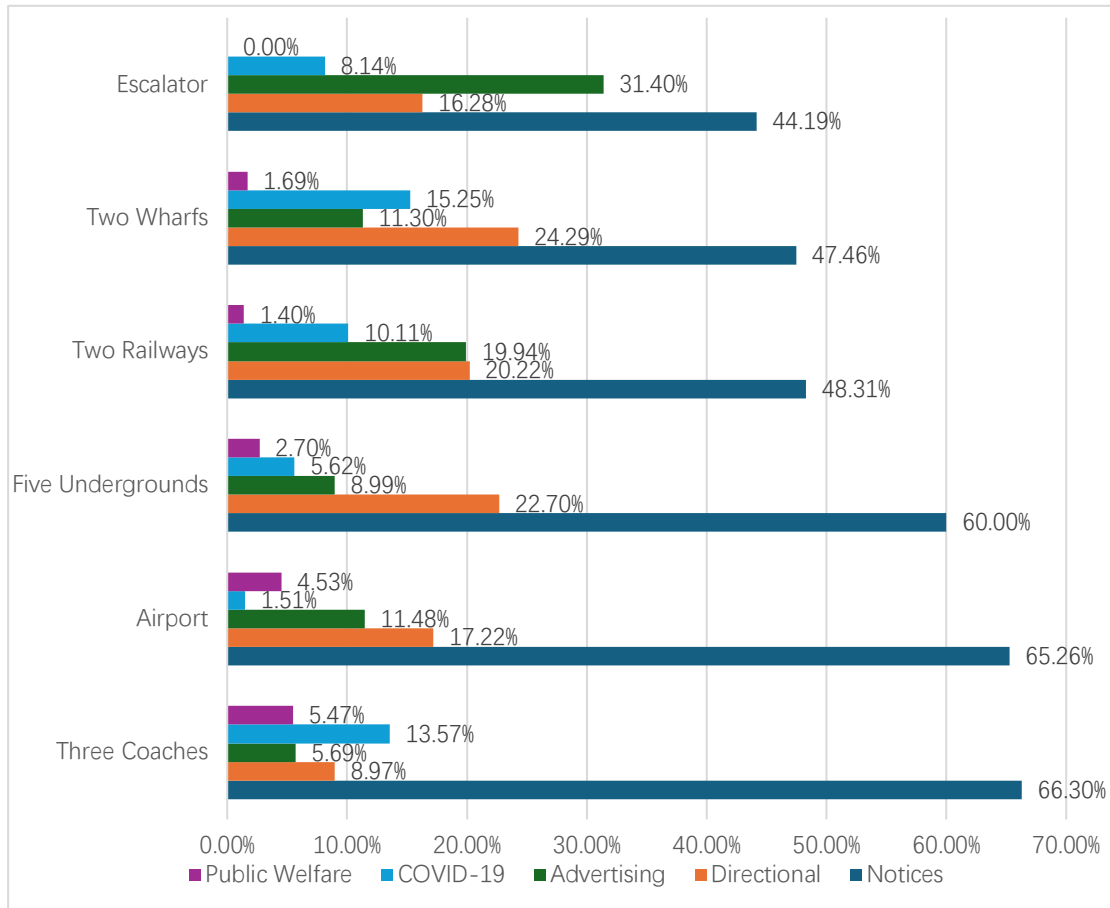
	Notices	Directional	Advertising	Public Welfare	COVID-19	Total	QR
Escalator	38	14	27	7	0	86	7
Two Wharfs	84	43	20	27	3	177	17
Two Railways	172	72	71	36	5	356	69

Airport	216	57	38	5	15	331	45
Five Metros	267	101	40	25	12	445	18
Three Coaches	303	41	26	62	25	457	32
Total	1,080	328	222	162	60	1852	188

The three coach stations contribute the most photo data (n=457), and the five metro stations the second most (n=445), while the Crown Escalator Station contributes the least (n=86). The international airport is the biggest data resource (n=331). 177 photos were collected at the two wharfs, and 356 photos at the two high-speed railway stations. The number of photos collected from each site more or less aligns with the size of each transport area, as will be discussed in later sections.

Among the classified categories, notices were the most numerous (n=1,080), direction signs were the second most (n=328), and advertising signs the third (n=222). Although public welfare signs (n = 162) and COVID-19 signs (n = 60) are relatively limited in the overall database, their distribution varied across sites, and they were not necessarily scarce at every individual site. The following sections will discuss the distribution of signs within of each category.

Chart 5. 1: Percentage of signs by functions and contents across sites



The Chart 5.1 presents the percentage of each categorised signs by function and contents in every transport hub. The percentage of categories varies significantly from site to site, thus each site is considered carefully in the following sections.

Notices

Notices are the most prevalent type of sign in all transport hubs. More than half of the collected signs were notices in coach stations (66.30%), the international airport (65.26%), and metro stations (60.00%). In all other sites notices took more than 40%. According to the definition in the previous chapter, notices encompass a broad range of materials, including more specific categories such as billboards, posters, and regulatory signs. From schedules and safety instructions to service changes and local regulations, notices account for nearly or even more than half of the signs across all sites in this study, underscoring the importance of clear and accessible information in public transportation settings.

Directional signs

Directional signs play an essential role in public transportation systems: providing accurate directional information to ensure smooth passenger flow and prevent congestion. Directional signs are the second most common signs at most transportation sites: wharfs (24.29%), metro stations (22.70%), high-speed railway stations (20.22%), and the international airport (17.22%). Direction signs mark a significant proportion in most public transport hubs and are the third most common signs in the Crown Escalator Station (16.28%) and the three coach stations (8.97%). This type of signage is fundamental to the operation of public transportation systems, as they guide passengers efficiently through stations, ensuring they reach their destinations without confusion.

Advertising signs

Advertising signs are third most prevalent type of sign at the international airport (11.48%), five metro stations (8.99%), and two high-speed railway stations (19.94). The high prevalence of advertisements in these locations has been extensively discussed in prior LL research. Advertisements are inherently common types of signage due to their commercial appeal, and both public transportation hubs and the signs themselves have significant commercial value that attracts advertisers.

At the two high-speed railway stations, the proportion of advertising signs is very close to that of the common directional signs. While the Crown escalator is the smallest transport hub in this study, the other hubs have much larger areas, providing ample space for a variety of signs, such as long corridors at the entrances and exits. Advertisements in these areas predominantly target local residents, promoting consumer products rather than tourist attractions.

In contrast with most cases, advertising signs were the second most prevalent sign type in the Crown escalator (31.40%). This site, with its compact layout consisting of one entrance, a 112-metres long escalator, and one exit, does not require many directional signs due to its straightforward internal structure. Passengers have only one route to

follow, making additional directional signs unnecessary. Instead, high visibility and foot traffic in this confined space present a prime opportunity for commercial advertisements

This scenario reflects the high commercial promotional value of signs at the Crown escalator. During my data collection at the Crown Escalator station, several travelling groups were led by a tour guide speaking through a loudspeaker, eager to experience the escalator. At the exit of the escalator station in Figure 5.1, a store sells special Chongqing food and gifts which target travellers instead of local residents.



Figure 5. 1: An advertising sign in Crown Escalator Station, “authentic Chongqing flavour”

The high volume of tourists significantly increases the exposure of advertisements, making the Crown Escalator an attractive spot for businesses to promote their products and services. Notably, a significant percentage of advertisements in the Crown Escalator promote other popular tourist spots in Chongqing, as Figure 5.2 shows. During data collection, it was observed that many tourists were actively engaging with these advertisements, reading them carefully and taking photos, integrating the advertisements into their overall experience of visiting the escalator.



Figure 5. 2: An advertising sign in Crown Escalator Station, “No river cannot be crossed.”

Besides, this finding also reflects the fact that the function of the Crown Escalator is transforming. Its physical function is fading as new roads and modern transport options like the metro and car-sharing services have made traveling across the hilly city much faster. but its function as a popular tourist attraction in Chongqing is growing, drawing numerous visitors daily.

Public welfare signs

Public welfare signs, which include messages about public health, safety, and community services, are a regulated form of signage commonly seen in China (Karmazin, 2020; Song & Gee, 2020). Public welfare signs are the second least common type of signage in the two high-speed railway stations (10.11%), the escalator station (8.14%), and five metro stations (5.62%), and the least common type in the international airport (1.51%).

One of the most popular designs of public welfare signs in China is in the form of long red fabric banners with gold Chinese characters, as shown in Figure 5.3. Public welfare signs can be multi-functional, aiming to strengthen community ideology, propagate certain government policies, or popularise positive social values. Public welfare signs are not necessary within a transportation hub, which explains their relatively small percentage in most public hubs. However, public welfare signs are the second most common type of sign in the three coach stations (13.57%), making these sites the only cases in this study where there are more public welfare signs than directional signs in a public transport hub.



Figure 5. 3: A public welfare sign in Xiaoshizi Metro Station, “Save power together, you and me.”

The difference in the number of public welfare signs across various sites can be attributed to practical observations made during the data collection process. Airport and high-speed railway stations tend to have well-planned and orderly signage, making hanging red fabric banners less suitable. Sites such as wharfs and coach stations, which

have been in use for a longer time, exhibit more random placement and order of signs. Many of these signs show signs of long-term presence, with some not having been removed or replaced for extended periods.

COVID-19 signs

COVID-19 signs are the second least common type of signage in the international airport (4.53%), and the least common type of sign in the three coach stations (5.47%), five metro stations (2.70%), two wharfs (1.69%), and two high-speed railway stations (1.40%). No COVID-19 signage is found in the Crown Escalator Station.

During the first data collection period in December 2022, China had just lifted its strict pandemic control measures. Figure 5.4 below was collected from the official Weibo account of the Chongqing government and showcases a nucleic acid test station at the entrance of the Jiangbei international airport in August 2022, but the station and all the signs were removed in December 2022.



Figure 5. 4: A nucleic acid test station in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport³²

³²From Weibo public post: @ Chongqing government website, 2022 August 24. “Chongqing Airport has added nearly 30 new sampling stations...”
<https://weibo.com/5147472080/4805952378769516>

Following the lifting of pandemic control measures, most COVID-19 signs were quickly removed from public areas. As periodic nucleic acid tests were no longer a compulsory requirement, temporary test stations in public transport hubs were removed as well. Therefore, though COVID-19 signs can still be found at most research sites in this study, these can be considered as post-COVID sign, such as notices reminding passengers to wear a mask and keep 1-meter social distance as a recommended long-term public health measurement.

Some remnant COVID-19 signs at coach stations are considered as during-COVID signs since they encouraged citizens to take the vaccine or included directions to the location of nucleic acid test stations, indicating a slower process of updating and maintaining signage in these areas, as captured in Figure 5.5. This phenomenon further illustrates the point discussed in the last section, that the replacement of signage is slower in several public transport hubs, indicating a lack of signage management and a trend of decreasing passengers as a dated transport hub. As for wharfs which were temporally closed before the pandemic started, there were no traces of COVID-19 signs.



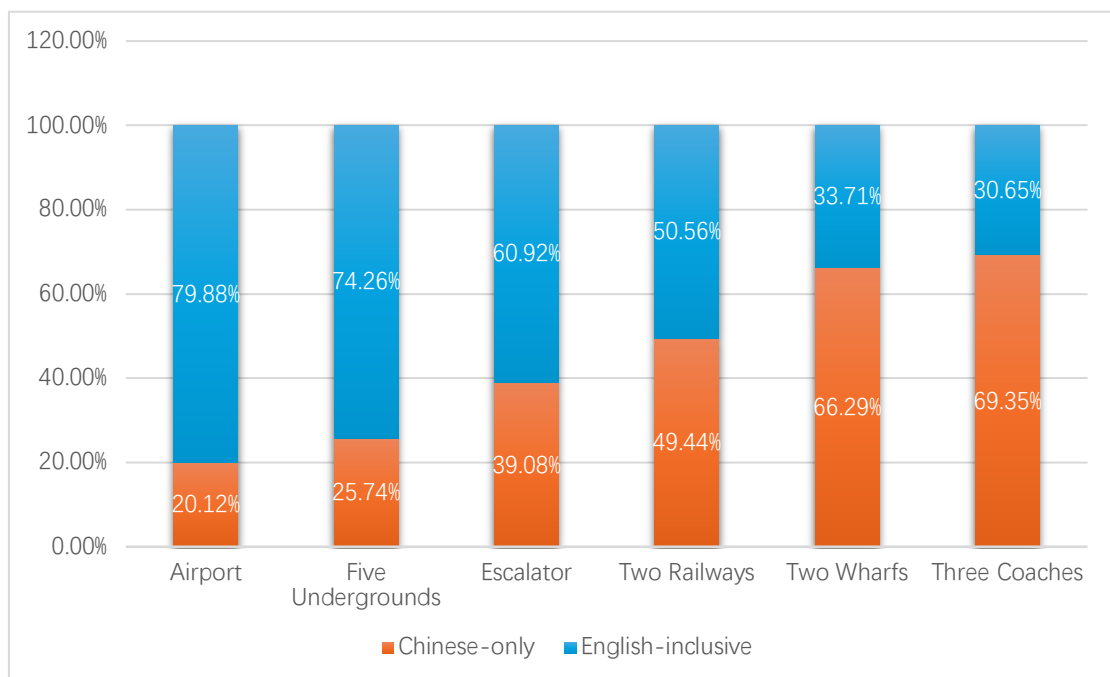
Figure 5. 5: A COVID-19 sign in Hongqihegou Coach Station, “temporary nucleic acid test site”

The analysis of the distribution of various types of signs at different transportation sites reveals significant insights into functional and commercial dynamics at play. Notices dominate due to their critical role in informing passengers, while directional signs are essential for navigation within complex transportation hubs. The unique case of the Crown escalator highlights the commercial potential of signage in high-traffic tourist areas. Public welfare signs reflect a top-down regulatory approach, particularly prevalent in older, less organised sites. Overall, the distribution and persistence of signage offer a window into the operational priorities and commercial strategies of public transportation systems.

5.3 Signs by language

This section analyses the representation of languages on signs in public transport hubs. Based on the actual situation of data collection, the categorisation of signs by languages is further divided into two categories: Chinese-only category and English-inclusive category, as displayed in Chart 5.2.

Chart 5. 2: Percentage of Chinese-only signs and English-inclusive signs across sites



The prominence of English-inclusive signs at the international airport (79.88%), metro stations (74.26%), and the Crown escalator (60.92%) is particularly notable. This trend is especially pronounced in the international airport and metro stations, where the number of English-inclusive signs significantly exceeds Chinese-only signs. The high visibility of English in these locations likely reflects a higher proportion of international tourists, prompting sign producers to intentionally incorporate English translations or annotations to cater to the needs of non-Chinese speaking visitors.

The prevalence of English-inclusive signs in non-English speaking countries has been a subject of extensive research. Previous studies (e.g. Lock, 2003; De Los Reyes, 2014; Sutthinaraphan; 2016) suggest several reasons and symbolic meanings for this phenomenon, such as globalisation, perceived prestige, and role as a lingua franca. These aspects will be discussed in more detail in later sections.

At the two high-speed railway stations, English-inclusive signs (50.56%) are closely followed by Chinese-only signs (49.44%). This small difference suggests a balanced approach to catering to both local passengers and international tourists. In contrast, coach stations (69.35%) and wharfs (66.29%) predominantly feature Chinese-only signs. Infrastructures at these traditional and long-established modes of transportation are considered dated to some extent, and appear to be less popular among international tourists, which may explain the lower prevalence of English and other languages in these areas.

The representation of languages on public transportation signs in Chongqing reveals much about the city's approach to accommodating both local residents and international visitors. The strategic use of English-inclusive signs in high-traffic areas like the airport and metro stations demonstrates an effort to create a more accessible and navigable environment for tourists. Conversely, the dominance of Chinese-only signs in traditional transport hubs suggests a focus on serving the local population in these areas. This linguistic landscape not only aids in practical navigation but also reflects broader

cultural and economic trends, such as the influx of tourists from specific countries and the city’s role as a globalizing metropolis.

As explained in Chapter 4, Chinese-only signs refer to signs which only contain Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, or Pinyin, the Romanised phonetic script for standardised Mandarin (Xuan et al., 2025). Identified sub-categories in this study are:

- 1) Simplified Chinese only
- 2) Traditional Chinese only
- 3) Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese only
- 4) Simplified Chinese and Pinyin only
- 5) Simplified Chinese
- 6) Traditional Chinese and Pinyin

English-inclusive signs refer to signs containing English, including English-only signs or bi/multilingual signs with languages other than English. Identified sub-categories are:

- 1) English only
- 2) Chinese and fully-translated English
- 3) Chinese and partially-translated English
- 4) English and Traditional Chinese
- 5) English, Chinese, and Pinyin
- 6) English, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese
- 7) English, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and Pinyin
- 8) more than two languages

The following sections will discuss each category and their sub-categories. Table 5.2 below displays the specific number of each sub-category of Chinese-only signs:

Table 5. 2: Number of sub-categories of Chinese-only signs

	Escalator	Five Metros	Two Wharfs	Three Coaches	Two Railways	Airport
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Simplified Chinese only	32	104	102	305	161	54
Traditional Chinese only	1	0	5	0	0	0
Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese only	1	3	6	0	6	4
Simplified Chinese and pinyin only	0	5	1	10	4	8
Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and pinyin	0	0	0	0	1	0

5.3.1 Chinese-only signs

Most signs in public transportation areas in Chongqing have only Simplified Chinese. This prevalence aligns with the content of national script laws and regulations mentioned in Chapter 4. Notably, this type of sign sometimes includes use of the Chongqing dialect.

There is a large three-dimensional sign at the international airport arrival level (Figure 5.6), reflecting the vocabulary of the Chongqing dialect: “勒是重庆，又飒又娇，巴适” (This is Chongqing, cool, charming, comfortable). The use of Chongqing dialect not only adds a unique local touch but also enhances the cultural authenticity of the visitor experience. Signs with other demonstrations of Chinese beyond Simplified Chinese collected across all research locations are relatively few, making their occurrence noteworthy and deserving of discussion.



Figure 5. 6: A pedestrian bridge in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, “This is Chongqing.”

Chinese-only signs with Traditional Chinese characters

Across all research sites this study found only six Traditional Chinese only signs. One such sign is located on the wall at the entrance of the Crown escalator, presenting a framed map of Chongqing gates from the Qianlong period (Figure 5.7). The map is very traditional, featuring hand-drawn icons marking important locations and buildings. During this period, China used Traditional Chinese characters, and the writing order was from right to left. Some location names on the map are still in use today, such as “朝天门 Chaotianmen” and “千厮门 Qiansimen”, while others have changed names, such as “洪崖门 Hongyamem” now “洪崖洞 Hongyadong”, or no longer exist. Displaying this old map in a modern escalator setting creates an interesting historical context for passengers and tourists.



Figure 5. 7: A map of ancient Chongqing in Crown Escalator Station, “Chongqing’s city gates”

Five Traditional Chinese only signs were found at the Chaotianmen wharf. One of these signs is an inscription “Chongqing Chaotianmen Square” by former president, Jiang Zemin, engraved in stone as a permanent display of respect from Chongqing’s government and people (Figure 5.8). The other four Traditional Chinese only signs were related to the Spring Festival, appearing on couplets and lanterns to enhance the festive atmosphere. These latter four signs are temporary and represent the long history of the festival as the most important annual event for the Chinese people.



Figure 5. 8: An inscribed stone in Chaotianmen Wharf, “Chongqing Chaotianmen Square”

Next, I will discuss cases where simplified and Traditional Chinese appear together. Except for coach stations, all other research sites had such signs. These signs share a common feature: Traditional Chinese characters only appear in the name or logo of a brand, institution, or airline, but not in the main content. Official institutions with Traditional Chinese characters in their logos are “Chongqing Daily”, “China Customs”,

and “China Construction”. Airlines with Traditional Chinese characters in their logos are “Air China”, “China Eastern Airlines”, and “Qingdao Airlines”. Additionally, several food brands feature Traditional Chinese characters in their names, such as “Yudashi” hotpot, “Qiaotou” hotpot, “Kangshifu” foods, “Xijiu” (Figure 5.9), and “Guizhou Anjiu” alcohol. *The Simplified Chinese Act* was passed in 1955. Except for China Customs, Air China, and China Eastern Airlines, which were established before 1955, all other brands mentioned here were established after the implementation of the Act. For newer brands, the use of Traditional Chinese characters in names and logos might be an attempt to convey a sense of being a long-established, trusted domestic brand.



Figure 5. 9: An advertising sign in Chongqing North Railway Station, “Chinese new year, drink Xijiu.”

Chinese-only signs with Pinyin

This study found a total of 29 signs featuring both Simplified Chinese and Pinyin. Chinese-Pinyin signs were most predominant at coach stations and the international airport. In the coach stations, seven Chinese-Pinyin signs were found prominently displayed as logos on information and advertisements for a Chongqing official service

platform named “愉客行”(Yú kè xíng) (see Figure 5.19). A plausible reason for this is that the character “行” has another pronunciation “háng” in Chinese, and using Pinyin helps clarify the correct pronunciation for readers, thereby preventing potential confusion. Another possibility may lie in Han and Shang’s (2024) discussion, that for shops or brands that aim to capture the symbolic significance of English but lack proficiency in this language, they turn to Pinyin, the Romanised phonetic system, to take the role of resembling the modernity and internationalisation English stands for in the Chinese context.

Two signs incorporate Pinyin as annotations beneath Simplified Chinese text, a practice often seen in Chinese-English bilingual signs. This method may aim to enhance the authority and international appeal of the content. Including Pinyin beneath the Chinese characters provides a useful reference for both Chinese speakers unfamiliar with certain written characters, and international tourists.

A different role for Pinyin is observed in the departure area of the international airport. Figure 5.10 is one panel in a series of similar signs showcasing expressions characteristic of the Chongqing dialect. These signs are designed with opera masks at the top, neatly written Simplified Chinese characters in the middle, and tone-marked Pinyin below.

Each expression is supplemented with explanations and example sentences clarifying their meanings and demonstrating their use in everyday life. QR codes beneath these signs allow passengers to listen to the actual pronunciation of the Chongqing dialect, which is a bit different from the Pinyin. For local residents, these expressions are familiar terms and phrases commonly used in daily conversations, providing an authentic glimpse into the linguistic habits of Chongqing’s inhabitants. Remarkably, this collection of signs is the only one in this study that includes tone markings in the Pinyin.



Figure 5. 10: A Chong dialect teaching sign in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, “nonsense”

Chinese-only signs with both Traditional Chinese characters and Pinyin

The sole sign that features Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and Pinyin together is an advertisement for a traditional Chinese liquor, shown in Figure 5.11. Each script shown on the sign serves a distinct purpose: Simplified Chinese conveys the main content, Traditional Chinese is used in the advertising slogan, and Pinyin is integrated into the brand logo.

To conclude, the use of languages within the Chinese linguistic system demonstrates distinct purposes. Simplified Chinese primarily functions to convey information and is the preferred method of communication between sign creators and readers. In contrast, Traditional Chinese and Pinyin are used mainly for their symbolic significance. Traditional Chinese evokes a sense of historical continuity, while Pinyin, by addressing the ambiguity of Chinese homophones and resembling the English alphabet, symbolises

modernisation and internationalisation. The use of these different scripts reflects their unique roles in Chinese society, balancing a sense of tradition and modernity, as well as local and global perspectives.



Figure 5. 11: An advertising sign in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station, “A better-tasting premium sauce-aroma baijiu”

5.3.2 English-inclusive signs

The context of English-dominant signs across this study’s research sites is complex because it involves the simultaneous presence of the Chinese system and other languages, as Table 5.3 below shows. Discussion in this section will be based on the specific number of languages involved.

Table 5. 3: Number of sub-categories of English-inclusive signs

	Escalator	Five Metros	Two Wharfs	Three Coaches	Two Railways	Airport
English only	0	1	0	0	0	1
Chinese and Fully-translated English	27	149	21	87	62	174

Chinese and Partially-translated English	24	104	35	53	101	58
English and Traditional Chinese	1	0	0	0	0	0
English, Chinese, and Pinyin	0	72	1	2	11	4
English, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese	1	3	1	0	7	13
English, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and Pinyin	0	0	0	0	2	0
More than two languages	0	0	2	0	0	22

English-inclusive signs: English only

This study identified only two examples of English only signs. One sign was located on the side of an automatic ticket machine at the Hongqihegou Metro Station, displaying solely the word “welcome” in English. Passengers primarily interact with the other side of this machine, which is labelled in both Simplified Chinese and English. Unlike other ticket machines, this unique sign does not offer much for comparison and further discussion.

The other purely English sign is situated next to the baggage wrapping station at the international airport (Figure 5.12). It explains baggage regulations to passengers entirely in English. Although another sign nearby presents the same content in Simplified Chinese, this English sign does not follow the typical bilingual format found in this study, where English appears below Chinese as a translation. Instead, it is exclusively in English. As previously discussed, this sign further confirms the international nature of the airport and indicates that the number of international travellers there is greater compared to other transportation hubs.



Figure 5. 12: An English notice in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport

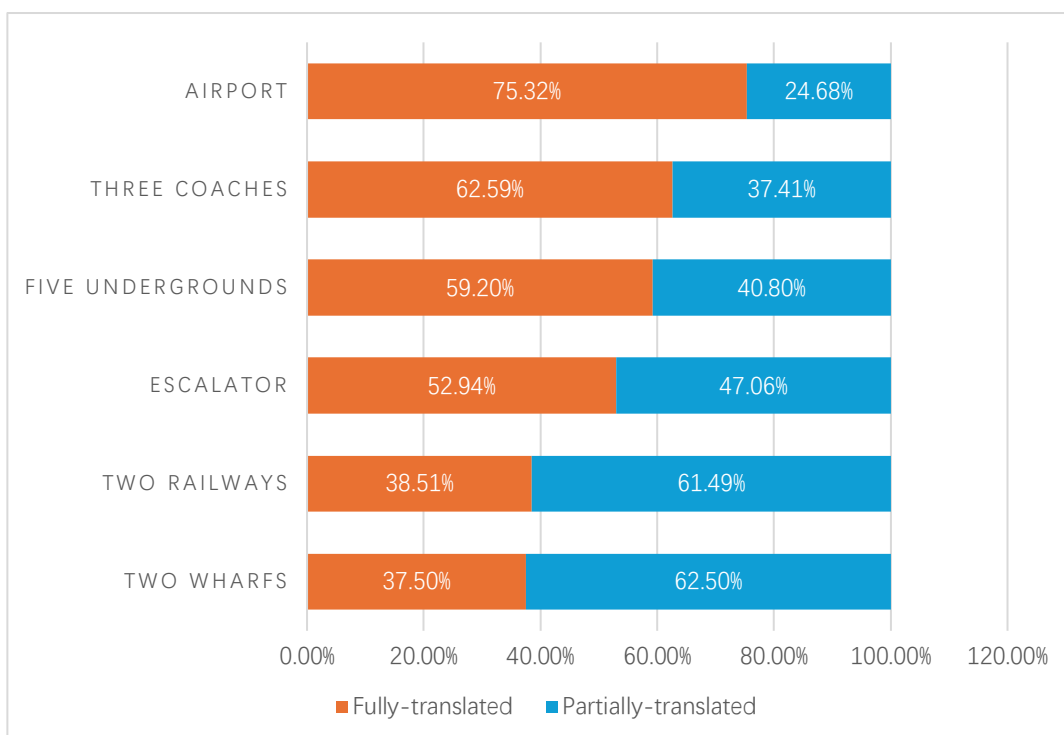
It is also worth noting that widely recognised English abbreviations sometimes replace Chinese text entirely, such as “APP” and “VIP.” Although the public may not recognise the full form of these abbreviations, they are widely accepted and understood within China, with “APP” even appearing in official announcements. This widespread usage

underscores the integration of these terms into everyday language, reflecting globalisation and technological influence.

English-inclusive signs with Simplified Chinese

Signs containing both Simplified Chinese and English constitute a significant proportion of the signs studied. This study further categorises these signs based on whether the English content is complete, resulting in two categories: Chinese and fully-translated English signs, Chinese and partially-translated English signs. Referring to Chart 5.3, at the international airport (75.32%), coach stations (62.59%), metro stations (59.20%), and the Crown escalator (52.94%), Chinese and fully-translated English signs are more prevalent than Chinese and partially-translated English signs.

Chart 5. 3: Percentage of Chinese and fully-translated English signs and Chinese and partially-translated English signs



It is noteworthy that in metro stations, coach stations, and the Crown Escalator Station, signs with both English and Chinese are primarily notices or directional signs with

simple Chinese content. They usually contain one word or short phrase such as “exit”, or “no smoking” and require little effort to translate.

In contrast, at the international airport, most Simplified Chinese-English bilingual signs have corresponding English translation for all Chinese contents, such as the sign shown in Figure 5.13. This higher demand for English proficiency on the part of the sign producers reflects the airport's emphasis on accommodating international visitors and the high degree of internationalisation required for its signs. The presence of comprehensive bilingual signage at the airport underscores its role as an international gateway and its commitment to providing clear and accessible information to a global audience.



Figure 5. 13: A notice in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport

English-inclusive signs with Traditional Chinese

The only instance of a combination of Traditional Chinese and English was found on a mat at the bottom of the escalator as Figure 5.14 shows. The mat bore the phrase “歡迎光臨” in Traditional Chinese, with the English word “welcome” written below it. This unique signage stood out as an anomaly because it was unlike other mats that lacked such bilingual presentation. The reason for this specific occurrence remains unclear.



Figure 5. 14: A mat in Crown Escalator Station

English-inclusive signs with Simplified Chinese and Pinyin

Signs featuring Simplified Chinese, English, and Pinyin together are relatively rare, but their presence in metro stations is significantly higher than in other places. This prevalence is mainly due to the translation issues related to place names in Chongqing, encompassing metro stations, streets, and buildings. Although conventions for translating Chinese names into English is not a primary focus of this study, a brief discussion is warranted here.

From the collected signs, it appears that the translation of place names in Chongqing's metro stations is currently inconsistent. For example, at Xiaoshizi Station, Hongyadong is sometimes referred to as "Hongya Cave" on signage and other times as "Hongyadong" in Pinyin. Similarly, Jiefangbei is translated as "Monument for Liberation" in some instances and also presented in Pinyin as "Jiefangbei". This inconsistency indicates an emerging trend towards more precise translations of place names, but the management and replacement of signs towards this end remains uncoordinated. A similar situation is observed at high-speed railway stations. For instance, Chongqing West is translated

as “Chongqing West” on directional signs but appears as “Chongqingxi” in Pinyin on the largest sign atop the station. For foreign passengers, this inconsistency in using the same alphabet for different representations of the same place can be particularly confusing. Thus, the standardised use of place names in signage is necessary to avoid unnecessary trouble and ensure clarity for all travellers.

English-inclusive signs with Simplified and Traditional Chinese

Instances where English appears alongside both Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese mainly occur at high-speed railway stations and the international airport. At Chongqing north railway station, the exit hall’s pillars were uniformly decorated with advertisements for major tourist attractions in Chongqing during the data collection period. These advertisements shared a consistent style and layout, with the traditional script name at the top and a simple drawing of the attraction below.

As shown in Figure 5.15, on the left side of the sign, there was a uniform slogan “嘞斗是重庆/this is Chongqing,” written in the local dialect rather than standardised Mandarin. On the right side, the phrase “中国重庆” in Traditional Chinese was uniformly written in a stamp style, which in ancient Chinese culture represented status and authority. This style on the signs not only demonstrated Chongqing’s official enthusiasm for promoting local tourist attractions but also instilled a sense of “official endorsement” for visitors preparing to visit these sites.



Figure 5. 15: An advertisement in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station, “the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River”

For signs featuring Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and English together, the situation at the international airport is similar to that of signs featuring only Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese, with Traditional Chinese primarily appearing in the names or logos of airlines. These names are incorporated into the logos of the signs produced by the airlines, serving mainly a symbolic purpose and being unrelated to the type and content of the signs. The inclusion of Traditional Chinese characters in these logos often aims to evoke a sense of heritage and trustworthiness, appealing to both local and international passengers.

English-inclusive signs with Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and Pinyin

One sign featuring English, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and Pinyin together is found on a directional sign at Chongqing west railway station (Figure 5.16). The sign indicates to passengers what stores and brands can be found on the second floor by displaying the logos of stores in one place.

This sign demonstrates that the design of a brand’s logo is always aligned with its product and origin. Brands selling Chinese products or foods such as “谷记茶庄” (Guji Tea House), “李先生牛肉面大王” (Mr. Li Beef Noodle King) prefer to use Chinese only, with some adopting a combination of Simplified and traditional characters. However, banks and modern business, such as the travel company “龙腾出行” (Dragon Pass) and dessert shop “咖图斯” (Katusi) prefer to include English in their logos, building up a feeling of luxury and internationalisation and attracting consumers who perceive English as possessing these ideal qualifications (Blommaert, 2013). Intriguingly, in all of the signs in Figure 5.16 which feature it, the abbreviation “VIP” directly replaces the equivalent Chinese word “贵宾” uniformly.



Figure 5. 16: A directional sign in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

Another sign involving English, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and Pinyin is an advertisement for Chinese rock tea within the passageway at Chongqing west railway station (Figure 5.17).



Figure 5. 17: An advertising sign in Chongqing West High-speed Railway Station, “Famous Da Hong Pao tea masters in China”

In these signs, English translations are provided for specifying the type of product as “rock tea”. However, the English text is in smaller size and placed in a less prominent position compared to the Chinese text, which dominates the main layout. Simplified Chinese occupies the central and most visible part of the sign. Traditional Chinese characters appear on the packaging of gift boxes depicted in the images, giving an impression of heritage and authenticity. Pinyin, which aids in pronunciation, is positioned around both the Simplified and Traditional Chinese text in a manner similar to English. Although the presence of English categorises this sign as English-inclusive, the content is primarily driven by Simplified Chinese, suggesting that the advertiser’s main target audience is Chinese.

English-inclusive signs: multilingual signs

Lastly, this section discusses multilingual signs, which are defined as those featuring at least two languages. Here, languages refer to distinct languages rather than related varieties. Apart from two restroom signs found at Chaotianmen wharf, which include Simplified Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean, all other multilingual signs are located at the international airport. Most of these signs are quadrilingual, featuring Simplified Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean, as shown in Figure 5.18. These signs are primarily found on information and directional signs, providing complete translations of the Chinese content and serving a practical informational purpose. This setup indicates that Japan and South Korea are likely the non-English-speaking countries with the highest number of visitors to Chongqing.

A few signs include other languages, which typically appear in company names and logos. Qatar Airways uses Arabic in its branding, and Tibet Airlines incorporates Tibetan script, symbolizing their respective local languages. These instances of language use emphasise the cultural and regional identities of the companies.



Figure 5. 18: A notice in the children’s playground area in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport

In conclusion, the diverse linguistic landscape of public signage in Chongqing reflects a blend of practical communication needs and cultural symbolism. Simplified Chinese primarily serves an informative function, while Traditional Chinese and Pinyin often carry symbolic functions. English operates across both informative and symbolic functions, while the other foreign languages such as Korean and Japanese are used for communication in the international airport. Inconsistency in English translation highlights the need for standardised practices to enhance clarity and accessibility for all users. The inclusion of local Chongqing dialect and globally recognised abbreviations further enriches the linguistic tapestry, making public signage in Chongqing a fascinating subject of study in the context of globalisation and cultural preservation.

5.4 Signs by format: QR codes

As Table 5.1 shows, the number of QR codes are not included in the total number of physical signs collected in this study, but listed separately for discussing their significance in public transport hubs. Serving as the connection between physical signs and virtual signs, QR codes epitomise technologised modern life, making it necessary

to discuss their specific roles in public areas. The integration of QR codes into public transportation infrastructure is a testament to the growing interdependence between digital technology and everyday life. In this study, QR codes are further subdivided and discussed in this subsection. Firstly, based on the criteria for classification by function versus content within the present taxonomy, physical signs containing QR codes are coded. It should be noted that some physical signs contain more than one QR code, so the number of QR codes is higher than the actual number of signs on which they appear. The detailed results are shown in the Table 5.4 below:

Table 5. 4: Number of QR codes on physical signs

	Notices	Directional	Advertising	Public Welfare	COVID-19	Total
Physical signs with QR codes	94	4	80	9	1	188
Percentage value	11.49%	1.22%	36.03%	5.56%	1.67%	
Actual number of QR codes	135	4	90	13	1	243
Average number of QR codes per physical sign	1.44	1	1.13	1.44	1	

Table 5.4 shows four pieces of information: the number of physical signs containing QR codes; the proportion of signs with QR codes in each category; the actual number of QR codes; and the average number of QR codes per physical sign. Firstly, the type of sign with the highest proportion of QR codes is advertising signs (36.03%). Although the largest number of signs with QR codes collected in this study is notices (n=94), only 11.49% of notices contain QR codes due to the large base number. The

third type is public welfare signs, with 5.56% having QR codes. For directional signs (1.22%) and COVID-19 signs (1.67%), the use of QR codes was limited, with content is mainly conveyed through traditional physical signs.

Secondly, of the top three types of signs with QR codes, there are on average more than one QR code. Notices and public welfare signs each have an average of 1.44 QR codes, while advertisements have an average of 1.13. This means that although advertisements have a higher proportion of QR codes compared to the other two types, the other two types tend to contain more QR codes on a single physical sign. As shown in the Figure 5.19 below, a notice guiding passengers to purchase tickets online can have up to 22 QR codes, each with its own code for different destinations.



Figure 5. 19: QR codes at the entrance of Chongqing North Station South Square Coach Station, “Scan to buy tickets.”

This study further divided QR codes into informative QR codes, which can be scanned for information, and instructional QR codes, which can be scanned for instructions. The breakdown of these two types of QR codes is shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5. 5: Number and percentage of informative QR codes and instructional QR codes

	Notices	Directional	Advertising	Public Welfare	COVID-19	Total
Total number of QR codes	135	4	90	13	1	243
Number of informative codes	50	2	56	8	0	116
Percentage of informative codes	37.04%	50.00%	62.22%	61.54%	0.00%	47.74%
Number of instructional codes	85	2	34	5	1	127
Percentage of instructional codes	62.96%	50.00%	37.78%	38.46%	100%	52.26%

The above figure records in detail the number and proportion of two types of QR codes on different types of signs. First, instructional QR codes (52.26%) appear slightly more frequently than informative QR codes (47.74%), but the difference is not significant. Except for the only COVID-19 sign with a QR code, both types of QR codes appear on all other types of signs, though preferences vary. Advertising signs (62.22%) and public welfare signs (61.54%) prefer to include informative QR codes, which provide more detailed content than physical signs or promote brands and official social media accounts. Notices prefer to include instructional QR codes informing of operations such as account registration, payment, participation in activities, and online ordering. The occurrence of QR codes on directional signs is very rare. Among the four directional signs with QR codes found in this study, two provide detailed maps and routes, and two introduce sponsor information.

The use of QR codes compensates for some weaknesses of physical signs, such as large size and extensive content, and improves the experience for both creators and users. From the perspective of QR code producers, these codes are a versatile tool for

conveying additional information or services to an intended audience. Firstly, QR codes significantly save the space required for signs. For passengers, QR codes clearly enhance their experience in public transportation by providing a more efficient and convenient operation on their smartphone.

The presence of QR codes cannot be ignored, and with technological development and practical needs, their use on different types of signs continues to expand. More importantly, this online–offline nexus is redefining the boundaries of public space, reshaping everyday interactions within it, and transforming physical LL’s discursive domain. QR codes offer a clear example that self-service infrastructures become increasingly entrenched in Chongqing’s public transport hubs and signal a broader shift toward digitalisation. The specific roles of QR codes at public transportation stations are also presented in further detail in Chapter 6.

5.5 Language on signs by function and content

Section 5.2 and 5.3 detailed various types of signs and languages used at public transport stations with charts comparing and interpreting data based on this study’s signage taxonomy. When considering location as a criterion, division of signage “by function and content” and “by languages” represent two different levels of classification. However, when focusing on signs themselves, understanding language usage on different types of signs helps us better comprehend the role of signage in public spheres. This present section combines these two criteria, discussing language usage on signs categorised by functions and contents.

Chart 5.4 presents the proportions of the two major language categories (English and Chinese) across different functional types of signs, followed by detailed presentations of the two language categories. Chart 5.5 shows the percentage of each sub-category of Chinese-only signs in each research site. It is evident that Chinese-only has an overwhelming dominance on public-welfare signs (82.72%) and COVID-19 signs

(66.67%), with both featuring 100% Simplified Chinese. The lowest proportion of Chinese-only signs is found in directional signs (21.34%), yet these are also 100% Simplified Chinese. The features of these signs reflect how their top-down management and standards are unified and regulated in accordance with the laws of the People’s Republic of China on *the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language* (2000), as well as *the Regulations of Chongqing on the management of signboards* (2010). For advertising signs (49.10%), Chinese-only and English-inclusive signs each account for almost half of the total.

Chart 5. 4: Percentage of Chinese-only signs and English-inclusive signs by functions and contents

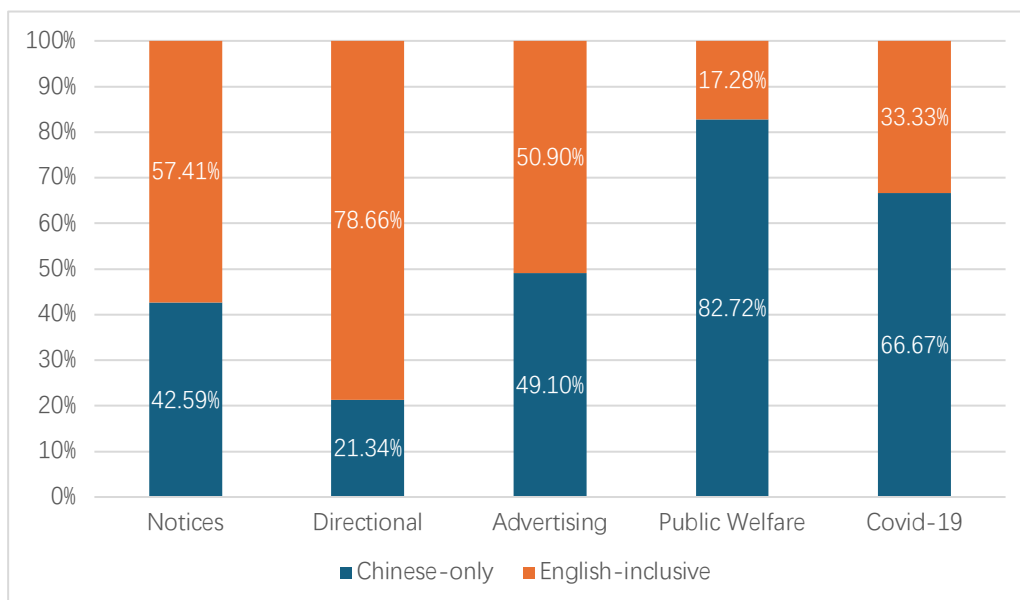
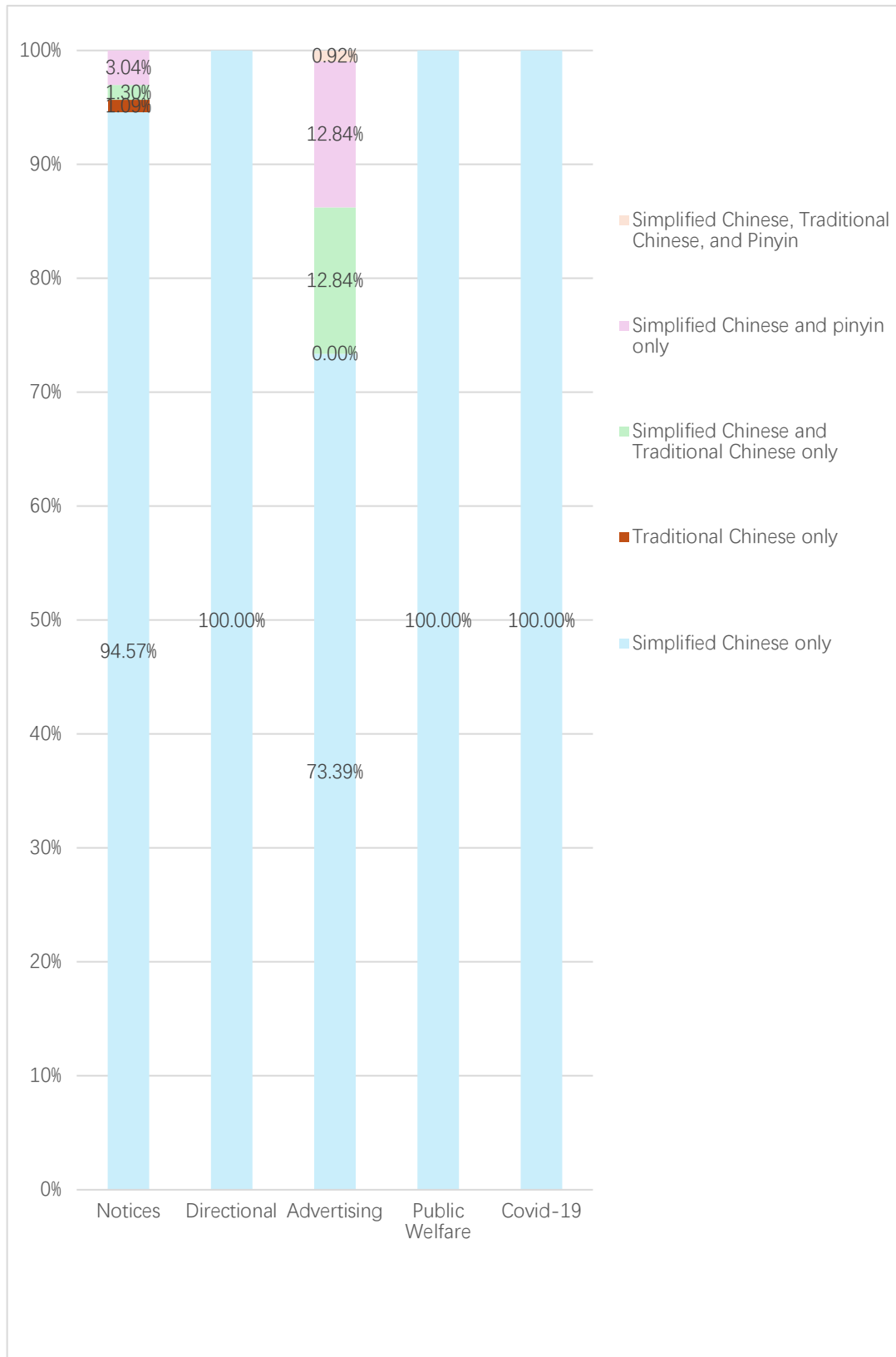


Chart 5.5 also indicates that advertising exhibits the greatest diversity in language use. All forms of Chinese discovered in this study are employed in commercial and non-commercial promotions, displaying great flexibility and autonomy. Currently, advertisers and manufacturers at Chongqing’s transport stations also prefer combinations of Simplified Chinese and Pinyin (12.84%) as well as Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese (12.84%).

Chart 5. 5: Percentage of sub-categories of Chinese-only signs

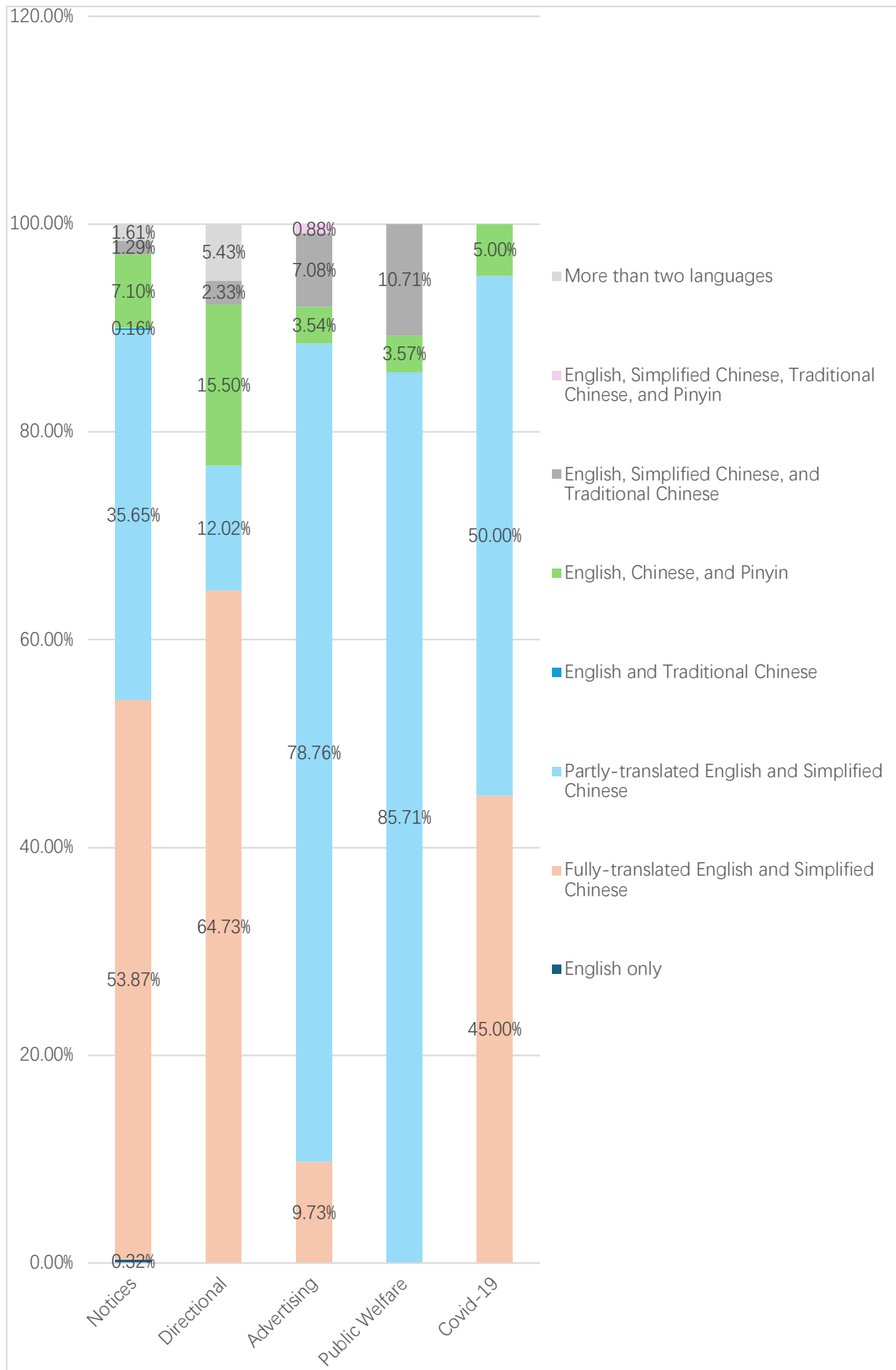


In notices, the proportion of Chinese-only signs (42.59%) is slightly lower than that of bilingual signs (57.41%), but they still exhibit considerable variety in their

arrangements of Chinese. Compared to other signs, advertising and notice signs do not necessarily follow a top-down approach, allowing advertisers and manufacturers to use various combinations of text forms.

Chart 5.6 shows the percentage of each sub-category of English-inclusive signs in each research site.

Chart 5. 6: Percentage of sub-categories of English-inclusive signs



Combining Chart 5.4, although 50.90% of advertising and 57.41% of notices include English, the extent of translation and specific usage vary greatly. Only 9.73% are fully translated, while 78.76% of advertising features partial English, mainly as product keywords or within brand names, serving a symbolic function in conveying a sense of internationalism and luxury for Chinese-speaking target customers. In contrast, 53.87% of bilingual notices are fully translated, highlighting the more significant informative function of English in these cases.

78.66% of directional signs are bilingual, the highest proportion, with 64.73% having fully translated their Chinese content into English. As top-down signs, these instances reflect the government's close attention to the internationalisation of directional signs and their timely updates. 57.41% of notices are bilingual, with over half (53.87%) having complete English translations. Notably, 45% of COVID-19 signs are also fully translated. As discussed in Section 5.2, bilingual COVID-19 signs are almost exclusively found at international airports, retained as public health and hygiene measures advocated in the post-COVID era. However, due to the pandemic policies at the time, many international flights were suspended, and foreign tourists were almost wholly unable to enter China. Therefore, COVID-19 signs at transport stations other than airports are only in Chinese. The language choice reflects the different types of tourists targeted at different stations.

This finding is also consistent with what is seen among public welfare signs. Although 17.28% of the signs are categorised as English-inclusive, a review of each photo revealed that none of the main text content of public welfare signs includes English or other forms of Chinese. The languages appear only in the names or logos of institutions, or in accompanying illustrations. For example, in waste classification signs, the illustrations of trash cans always include corresponding English terms, but the main content lacks English explanations. This is likely because the target audience of public welfare signs is Chinese residents, with the purpose of enhancing national happiness

and promoting socialist core values, without needing to consider whether international tourists can understand the content. By discussing the specific language usage on various functional types of signs, it enables exploring ideas of the sign producers and gaining insights into policy and economic conditions by analysing motivations and target customers.

5.6 Features and changes

The previous sections presented and interpreted numerical results for each signage category. Alongside these findings, several distinctive features of signage and changes within the selected sites also emerged. This section synthesises those observations, explains why they are significant, and brings them together into an integrated discussion.

5.6.1 Changes and transitions in public transport modes

This study found an obvious trend that traditional transport is fading while modern transportation is rising. It explored two possibilities for the future of traditional transport: one in which traditional transport is gradually replaced by more modern transportation, and the one in which traditional transport assumes new social functions.

Coaches, ships, and the escalator are being replaced by metros, high-speed trains, and airplanes.

This study explored six different urban public transportation stations, covering most of the main urban area of Chongqing. Chongqing Coach Station was built in 1995, and the large escalator was built in 1996. Chaotianmen Wharf has an even older history in Chongqing. In ancient times, the wharf was the main waterway entrance and exit of Ba City, a major city in the Bashu area, and was also the place where officials received imperial edicts, hence the name “Chaotian” (facing heaven). More than a hundred year ago, the Qing Dynasty government established a customs office at Chaotianmen. In 1927, during the Republic of China period, the Chaotianmen Wharf was rebuilt and has been expanded and rebuilt several times until today. Previous discussions about the role

of different types of signage at different locations, personal observations made during the data collection process, and the signage at these sites indicates the three traditional transportation methods considered in this study—coaches, escalators, ships—are gradually withdrawing from the daily lives of Chongqing’s urban residents.

One piece of evidence is that some signs at the coach stations and wharfs have not been updated or cleaned for a long time. Signs are often worn-out, and their content no longer fits the context of the current society. Consequently, public transit departments appear to be paying relatively little attention to these sites and to be involved in only minimal management.

Secondly, there are closed areas at both the coach stations and the wharfs, indicating that reduced space is sufficient to cope with the current passenger flow, and to some extent reflecting a loss of passenger flow. During several data collection trips, there were not many passengers in the coach station hall and the entrance of the wharfs, in sharp contrast with the density of passengers at the metro stations, high-speed rail stations, and airport. Although Jiangbei International Airport was built in 1990, new terminal buildings and routes are still being built. There are also new areas under construction in the metro station, with signs placed in the construction areas, clearly informing passengers of upgrades. Chongqing West Railway Station only started operating in 2018 and is currently the newest public transportation station in Chongqing. Signs too show traces of changes, indicating the development and evolution of modern urban public transportation.

Traditional transportation stations are undergoing functional and definitional changes

The commercial and tourist characteristics of signage inside the Crown Escalator were discussed in 5.2.3. Signage in this location, as well as the number of tour groups confirms that its function is shifting from a transportation station to a tourist attraction. Similarly, Chaotianmen Wharf and Hongyadong Wharf are becoming popular tourist

destinations. Although the proportion of advertisements at these two stations is not as high as that of the Crown Escalator, most of the advertisements are tourism-oriented, providing various experiences and services for tourists, such as night cruises on the Yangtze River and costume photography.

This research initially endeavoured to include the Yangtze River Cableway as a research site. The Yangtze River Cableway is another distinctive traditional transportation method in Chongqing. I myself rode it many times as a child, crossing the Yangtze River from Jiefangbei District to Nan'an District. During the first round of data collection, the site was full of tourism advertisements, tourist shops, and endless lines of tour groups. Now, to ride the cableway, one needs to book in advance online, and in extreme cases, the queue time exceeds several hours. Since it is almost certain that locals no longer use the cableway as a daily transportation method, the idea of including the cableway as a research site was not adopted. Although it still physically functions as a transportation method, it no longer exists as a daily transportation option for local residents.

Modern and faster transportation methods have diverted most passengers from traditional transportation. If traditional transportation modes are to be preserved, the most feasible and effective method seems to be to transform them into tourist attractions. These changes can be felt and anticipated from the public signs within the stations. The local linguistic landscape constructs a narrative of infrastructural change by differentiating spaces of mobility from spaces of leisure. While spaces of mobility are associated with contemporary movement, efficiency, and circulation, spaces of leisure are framed through historical distance and material traces of the past. This contrast is made visible through the materiality of the linguistic landscape itself that old-fashioned transport infrastructure, worn signage, and ageing visual forms together produce a semiotic assemblage that unmistakably evokes an earlier period.

5.6.2 Function and significance of language on signs

The official written script used in Chongqing is Simplified Chinese, which undoubtedly carries the primary informative function in the public signage discussed in this study. The data collected for this research includes Simplified Chinese, English, Traditional Chinese, Pinyin, Japanese, and Korean. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore the different manifestations of these languages and scripts in the context of public transportation signage. Overall, apart from English, the frequency of other languages and scripts appearing on public transportation station signs is significantly lower. Among these, Japanese and Korean clearly serve an informative function in notices and directional signs, while Traditional Chinese, Pinyin, and other languages or scripts predominantly serve a symbolic function in advertising. English, on the other hand, performs both functions depending on the actual context.

The prevalence and spread of English

Based on data collected from international airports, metro stations, high-speed rail stations, and Crown escalator, signs containing English exceed 50%. In all categories of signage, the proportion of notices, directional signs, and advertising signs that include English also exceeds 50%. This demonstrates that the use and of English in Chongqing's public transportation stations is widespread.

In directional signs, the corresponding ratio of English to Chinese is the highest. This is partly because the content of directional signs is usually simple, only containing place names and arrows. This simplicity facilitates easy and effective translation into English, ensuring that both local and international travellers can understand essential information without confusion. The presence of English in notices is related to the length and location of the content. Short notices are more likely to have a higher proportion of English translation, while long notices tend to only translate the source and title into English. However, at international airports, most long notices have corresponding English translations, which can be attributed to the origin of travellers;

airplanes are the primary choice for most foreign tourists, making international airports the main entry and exit points for passengers whose native language is not Chinese.

In advertising signs, English primarily serves a symbolic function and commercial value. Some Chinese local brands prefer to include their English brand names in their logos. This practice aligns with the global marketing trend where English is perceived as modern, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan. However, in advertisements collected for this study, almost no ads translated their specific content into English. This indicates that brand owners and advertisers value the symbolic meaning English has in the minds of Chinese residents, using English in logos to create a more fashionable, international, and luxurious commercial image. The symbolic use of English in advertisements aims to appeal to the aspirational values of consumers, associating the brands with global prestige and modernity.

The symbolic role of Traditional Chinese, Pinyin, and other minor languages

Although Traditional Chinese was once the official script of China and is still widely used by residents of Cantonese-speaking regions and overseas Chinese, its frequency of appearance in Chongqing's public transportation stations is limited and mainly symbolic. Despite the character simplification movement, some official institutions retain Traditional Chinese in their official logos, such as Air China and Chongqing Daily, as mentioned in the section 5.3.1. For brands and their advertisements, traditional Chinese products like tea and liquor, and local foods like hotpot prefer to use Traditional Chinese characters. These characters help create a "traditional and classic" old-brand image, carrying a sense of heritage and increasing reliability in the minds of residents. The use of Traditional Chinese characters in branding is a strategic choice to evoke cultural nostalgia and trust, appealing to consumers' sense of historical continuity and quality. Another time when Traditional Chinese characters often appear is during Chinese traditional festivals, especially in the decorations for the Spring Festival, showcasing the inheritance and promotion of China's historical culture.

Although Pinyin is a mandatory part of basic education in China, it is only a phonetic notation system and cannot be used independently to convey information in public places. In the data collected for this study, Pinyin appears only as an annotation to Chinese characters. Pinyin is widely used in Chongqing's metro stations. According to the 2024 Chongqing metro map, there are nearly 400 metro stations in the urban area, many of which are not fully translated into English but are annotated with Pinyin. Observations suggest that fully and accurately translating metro station names into English is a trend, as seen in the transition from “Jiefangbei” to “Monument for Liberation.” However, this is an ongoing effort, and the signage at stations has not been completely standardised. The use of Pinyin annotations ensures that non-Chinese speakers can approximate the pronunciation of station names, aiding in navigation and comprehension.

This study also found signs containing Tibetan and Arabic scripts, specifically in the logos of Tibet Airlines and Qatar Airways. This reflects the airlines' tendency to use and promote local scripts, serving a symbolic function and having no necessary connection to the management and use of signs at Chongqing's public transportation stations. The inclusion of these scripts in airline logos signifies cultural diversity and recognition of linguistic heritage, enhancing the cultural identity of the airlines.

The informative role of Japanese and Korean

This study found a small number of signs containing Korean and Japanese scripts. Although these signs were located at the airport, Korean and Japanese appeared in both notices and directional signs. Korean and Japanese serve a communicative function in public transportation stations. This suggests that Korea and Japan are likely the countries with the most visitors to Chongqing among non-English-speaking countries, prompting airports to consider the communication needs of Korean and Japanese speakers. The presence of Korean and Japanese translations in notices and directional

signs ensures that visitors from these countries can navigate Chongqing's transportation system more easily, enhancing their travel experience and safety.

The strategic inclusion of these languages reflects an understanding of the demographic patterns of international tourists and a commitment to accommodating their needs. By providing information in Korean and Japanese, Chongqing's transportation authorities demonstrate cultural sensitivity and hospitality, which can positively influence the perception of the city's transportation infrastructure among foreign visitors. In addition, this study found that notices and advertising signs are more likely to appear in multiple languages, with more flexible forms and richer content; while other types of signs are relatively more standardised and regulated.

In summary, the diverse linguistic landscape of Chongqing's public transportation signage reveals both practical and symbolic considerations. Simplified Chinese remains the dominant written language due to its primary informative function for the local population. English, due to its global status, is widely used and serves both informative and symbolic functions. Traditional Chinese and Pinyin provide cultural and practical support in the form of notices and directional signs on the spot, respectively, while other minor languages like Tibetan and Arabic highlight cultural inclusivity in the form of logos. Finally, Japanese and Korean cater to significant tourist demographics, ensuring effective communication and enhancing visitor experience. This multifaceted approach to language usage in public signage reflects Chongqing's efforts to balance local needs with international accessibility and cultural representation.

5.7 Summary

This chapter outlined and discussed quantitative results based on a modified taxonomy. Findings provide an overview of the LL in Chongqing's main transport hubs and offer valuable insights into the distribution of different types of signs and how these signs meet the requirements of passengers and urban transportation development. The presence and distribution of different languages on signs are indicative of underlying

social dynamics and the priorities of urban planners and policymakers in fostering a welcoming environment for all. These findings support Han and Shang's (2024) discussion on how language choices in linguistic landscapes are influenced by both the social makeup of visitors and local factors. The next chapter will proceed from qualitative analysis to discussing the expanded functions of signage and public transport hubs.

A Multifunctional Large-scale Assemblage: Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter offered a general overview of the linguistic landscape of Chongqing's major public transport hubs. This included an examination of the distribution of different categories of signage across six types of transport hub including airport, high-speed railway station, metro station, coach station, wharf, and escalator station, and a synthesis of the main findings drawn from the quantitative analysis. The present chapter turns to examining how various types of signage function in everyday practice or how they contribute to shaping users' experiences within large-scale, multifunctional public spaces.

Considering the scope of Chongqing's public transport system and the practical constraints associated with conducting detailed analyses at all locations, this chapter focuses on describing passenger experiences at Chongqing North High-speed Railway station as a representative case study. This site is particularly appropriate due to its rich and diverse signage environment, as well as its significant role in serving both local commuters and international travellers.

This chapter's analytical framework is grounded primarily in Pennycook's (2017) concept of assemblage, which understands public space as a dynamic configuration of

languages, semiotic resources, people, and places. Applied to linguistic landscape research, assemblage theory provides a relational, materialist lens that moves beyond static descriptions of linguistic diversity. Instead, it foregrounds how signs, languages, people, and material elements interact in fluid, contingent ways, continually producing and reshaping urban linguistic space. This chapter also applies Scollon and Scollon's (2003) concept of geosemiotics to interpret signage through three key dimensions: interaction order, visual semiotics, and place semiotics. This analytical framework contributes to a deeper interpretation of the role of signage as part of an assemblage, and to locating the social meanings embedded in semiotic resources, considering indexed historical and cultural elements within the context of Chongqing.

Methodologically, this chapter draws on the mobile orientation of ethnographic linguistic landscape research, particularly walk-based and participant-observation approaches (e.g., Liao et al., 2025; Lou, 2017; Maly, 2016). Following this line of work, I adopt a first-person perspective, positioning myself simultaneously as researcher and passenger, and base the analysis on my immersive experience of travelling by high-speed rail through Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station.

I visited Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station twice and took trains each time to collect data and record experiences in the station as a passenger under differing socio-health contexts. The first visit took place in January 2023, shortly after COVID-19 regulations had been lifted and the country was transitioning into a post-pandemic phase. The second visit occurred in December 2023, a time when the visible effects of the pandemic had largely dissipated, and public life had returned to a state of normalcy. These two field visits captured different versions of the station's linguistic landscapes, shaped by the surrounding sociopolitical and cultural atmospheres at the time. Specifically, this chapter seeks to recognise the railway station as a large-scale assemblage with different functional zones, and to examine interactions between signs, people, and spaces in each zone.

Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station is comprised of the following spaces and zones:

- a. The ground plaza as a negotiable in-between zone
- b. The ticket checking area as an information-guided passage zone
- c. The waiting hall as a passenger-friendly relaxation zone
- d. The shopping area as a diverse experiential commercial zone
- e. The boarding area as an organised crowd diversion zone
- f. The arrival level as a multi-functional interchange zone

Following an overview of the station, a sequential account of each space entered and of observations made is given.

6.2 A large-scale transport hub: Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

As one of China's four direct-administered municipalities and a key gateway to international regions, Chongqing holds strategic importance in national and international transportation networks. The Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station aligns with the country's broader strategies of economic integration and regional connectivity. The city's high-speed railway system, a critical component of the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle, plays a transformative role in enhancing mobility, fostering economic growth, and supporting sustainable development in the region.

Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station serves as one of the largest and most important railway stations in southwestern China. The station is located in Yubei District as Figure 6.1 shows, close to the downtown districts of Jiangbei, Yuzhong, and Nanan. The station offers 112 high-speed trains with departures and arrivals, providing routes to major cities across China such as Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'an. Besides, the surrounding area is also home to other modes of transportation such as metro, coach, and bus, making the station's location convenient for both local residents and for travel to other areas. Though this chapter will mainly examine the railway

station, connection and interaction with other transport means are discussed where relevant.



Figure 6. 1: Location of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

Figure 6.2 presents a panoramic view of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station highlighting the spatial layout of this major transportation hub. The station is composed of a central station building, marked in yellow area, and two expansive ground plazas located to the north and south, marked in red. The station building itself spans approximately 110,000 square meters and is structured across three floors, each serving distinct functions related to passenger movement and station operations. Of the two plazas, the northern ground plaza is significantly larger, covering about 119,000 square meters. The northern ground plaza acts as the main gathering and dispersal space for passengers, with a wide-open space for drop-off, pick-up, and pedestrian circulation.



Figure 6. 2: Panoramic view of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

Figure 6.3 provides the floor plan of the station building, offering an overview of its three levels: the departure level (2F), the platform level (1F), and the arrival level (B1). Each level is further subdivided into specific functional areas such as ticketing, security checks, restrooms, waiting areas, commercial zones, and more, as indicated by the icons on the left side of the figure. This structured segmentation facilitates the flow and management of passengers while also shaping the linguistic landscape of each zone.

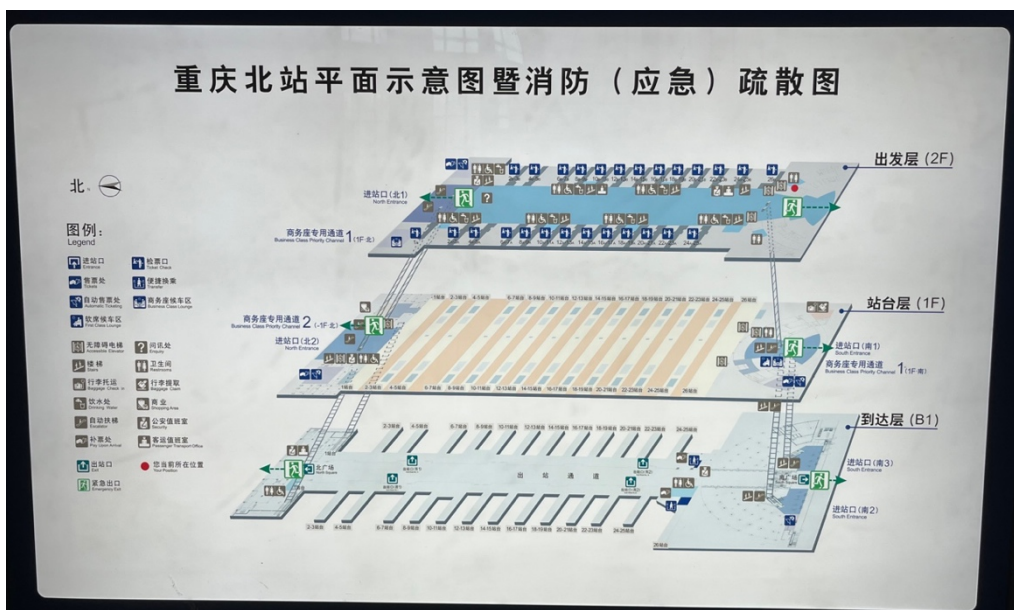


Figure 6. 3: Floor plan of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

6.3 The ground plaza: A negotiable in-between zone

Before entering the main building of the North Station, passengers must pass through the North or the South ground plaza. As shown in the Figure 6.2, the two plazas serve as pedestrian areas between the road and the station building. Functionally, this study found that the ground plazas primarily serve as a public leisure space in ordinary times. However, the plazas also functioned as regulated spaces for enacting COVID-19 control measures during the pandemic. The following analysis will discuss the north ground plaza as a dynamic zone within an assemblage and explore the changing interactions of signage, people, and space over time.

6.3.1 A leisable intermediate space

Under everyday circumstances, the ground plaza acts as a buffer zone between the road and the high-speed railway station, serving both as a public transportation transfer area and a rest area. This function is jointly reflected in the plaza's location, design, and the presence of signage. In terms of location, Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station is located in Yubei District, a well-developed economic area, near Jiangbei District, which is considered the city's downtown. The station connects to two metro stations and three metro lines. There are multiple other metro stations in the surrounding area. Adjacent to the plaza is a coach station of the same name. Across the roads surrounding Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station are several densely populated residential communities with numerous shops and restaurants.

Figure 6.4 is a birdseye view of the north ground plaza taken from a public user account on the social media platform RedNote. The north ground plaza is a broad open area with a large parking lot, several underpass entries, trees and green belts.



Figure 6. 4: Birdseye view of the north ground plaza³³

Although the plaza is spatially delineated, it lacks physical barriers, allowing the public to enter from any point connected to the road. The roads leading to the station building are wide, with regularly maintained green mediums. Numerous benches are available. Nearby residents use the plaza for walking, dog-walking, and allowing children to play in a traffic-free area. In the evenings, residents gather in the open spaces for square dancing. While all passengers heading to the high-speed railway station must pass through this plaza, the plaza does not solely serve railway passengers, but is a public space accessible to all local residents.

³³ From Baidu public post: @战火纪年. October 15, 2024.
https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_4914447377852797180

Regarding signage, the plaza's role as a community place of leisure is constructed through public welfare signs which carry a "non-commercial promotion" (Zhang & Zhang 2024). This is a relatively unique type of signage in China, which "mainly include non-commercial slogans and advertisements for public services to promote the core socialist values, traditional virtues of the Chinese nation, the development of civilised cities, the construction of the Communist Party of China (CPC), etc." (p.9). The sign in Figure 6.5 prominently displays current Socialist Core Values: 富强、民主、文明、和谐、自由、平等、公正、法治、爱国、敬业、诚信、友善 (prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, friendship).



Figure 6. 5: A public welfare sign in the north plaza, "core Socialist values"

As for interaction order and place semiotics, public welfare signs are typically large , three-dimensional and highly visible, being placed in the middle of large open spaces at eye level or slightly above the reader's line of sight. According to Hall's concept of social distance (1966), as discussed by Wee and Goh (2019) in relation to interaction order, public welfare signs in the plaza are positioned so that people approaching from different directions can read them at both social distance (4–12 feet) and public distance

(12–25 feet). This placement establishes clear spatial boundaries and supports psychological comfort, helping users engage with the public space more confidently.

The sign in Figure 6.5 is a prominent decorative element placed within a green space. The placement and form of the sign demonstrates a subtle approach to propagating ideology, wherein the advocacy of collective values is integrated into residents' everyday spaces of mobility through the deliberate utilisation of open space. Similar placements of public welfare signs in large open areas were observed at other data collection locations, such as Chaotianmen Wharf and Jiangbei International Airport. Public welfare signs in Chongqing's transportation hubs can be seen as serving a dual purpose in both decorating empty public spaces and promoting public welfare and ideological messages.

The ground plaza also features signage centred on building up a more civilised community through enhancing public awareness in everyday life activities such as waste-sorting. Figure 6.6 is placed at an underpass entry near the middle of the plaza. Waste classification is a public goal closely tied to residents' daily lives. The placement of these signs in public spaces became especially widespread after the 2017 release of the "生活垃圾分类制度实施方案"³⁴ (*Implementation Plan for Household Waste Sorting*), which made urban waste-sorting outcomes part of the evaluation criteria for "national civilised cities" and "national sanitary cities", two government certification schemes designed to assess and motivate local performance in governance standards, civic development, sanitation, and public health. By reminding residents and passengers of waste-sorting practices in high-traffic public areas such as the ground plaza, signage of this type exemplifies governmental strategies aimed at guiding public behaviour in shared spaces and highlights the current national focus on environmental governance.

³⁴ Source: https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-03/30/content_5182124.htm



Figure 6. 6: A public welfare sign at an underpass entry, “Waste sorting starts with me”

According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), the material composition and placement of signs are not merely practical considerations; they also carry significant symbolic meaning. The physical attributes of a sign, such as its material, durability, and installation method, contribute to its perceived authority, permanence, and social impact. The material used in public welfare signs is typically durable, and the cost of producing three-dimensional signage is relatively high. This suggests that the values conveyed by these signs are intended for long-term promotion and are intended to remain relevant to the public over an extended period. Spolsky (2020) emphasises that an understanding of the authorship of signs is crucial in LL research. It is evident that the public welfare signs on the north ground plaza are primarily produced by government subdistrict offices, making them top-down, institutionally managed signs. The content they convey aligns with what government institutions aim to promote and disseminate among the public.

In addition to public welfare signs, the two plazas also contain a small number of notices and directional signs, providing passengers with spatial guidance and pre-departure information. Figure 6.7 is placed beside a staircase near the middle of the

plaza. It clearly indicates the directions of various public places such as the taxi station, bus station, and different railway entrances, with icons, arrows, and English translations. These signs are placed in noticeable locations throughout the plaza even though they are not particularly prominent or numerous. Their primary function is to offer reminders to passengers heading to the high-speed railway station, while more detailed and important information is conveyed after entering the station, as will be discussed in the following sections.



Figure 6. 7: A directional sign beside a staircase

In sum, the design of this car-free, spacious, ground plaza, with its signage related to livelihood and national ideology, provides a living zone for nearby residents to engage in leisure activities. Thoughtfully placed notices and directional signs also address the needs of passengers seeking to use its associated public transport services. The diverse types and designs of these signs integrate seamlessly into the backdrop of the open plaza, blending naturally yet strategically into the sightlines of both residents and passengers. The ground plazas offer pleasant spaces for residents to rest and socialise, and give passengers a vivid taste of Chongqing's every day, human-centered lifestyle.

6.3.2 A regulated quarantine space

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the first data collection at this station was conducted at the beginning of 2023, just as pandemic control measures were being lifted across China. This timing allowed the study to capture both the significant transformation of the role of the ground plaza during a public health crisis and geopolitical narratives surrounding governance and public trust.

During three-years of pandemic control measures, the ground plaza functioned as a strictly controlled and governmentally supervised buffer zone before accessing public transportation. After restrictions were lifted, signage in this area was rapidly replaced, and the plaza became a space for post-pandemic policy promotion. This transition highlights how signage reflects the changing role of the same public space under different circumstances and the subtle relationship shift between the ground plaza and the high-speed railway building as distinct areas of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station. Though the public health crisis has now ended, discussing how signage in transportation hubs functions during special periods remains meaningful. Photos posted on social media during the pandemic are included here as data for comparison with the post-pandemic signage observed in this study.

During pandemic control, the ground plaza was restructured into a single-entry channel as shown in Figure 6.8, for conducting temperature checks and verification of passengers' nucleic acid test result and "health code", a data-driven system for pandemic management and contact tracing to classify individual risk and regulate access to public spaces and mobility (Yu, 2024).



Figure 6. 8: The regulated entry during COVID-19³⁵

As can be seen from Figure 6.8, another “gate” has been set up at the entrance, divided into four narrow single-person lanes, with pandemic entry requirements posted at the entrance, reinforcing regulations and pandemic prevention measures to every passenger.

As discussed in section 6.3.1, the function and atmosphere of the ground plaza are primarily constructed through the placement and visual presence of signage in normal everyday situations. However, during the abnormal situations, specifically here the pandemic, interaction order played a more dominant role. Most signage was placed in locations that required passengers to approach closely to read and interact, leading to reduced interpersonal distance, as described by Hall (1966), even shifting toward personal distance or intimate distance in some cases. I also noted from firsthand field observations that the control measures implemented during this special period prolonged the time passengers needed to enter and exit public transport facilities. This often resulted in queues and congestion around entrances and checkpoints. Under such

³⁵ From Weibo public post: @ser7ven. October 9, 2022.
<https://weibo.com/2215265570/4822588439923996>

crowded conditions, passengers found it difficult to maintain adequate social distancing or clear personal boundaries. During this period, the passenger experience in public transport environments was relegated to a secondary position, or even disregarded altogether, while the overriding priority was to satisfy pandemic-prevention requirements by following signage, using designated facilities, and complying with staff instructions.

Additionally, compared to other types of signage in public spaces, COVID-19 signs hold limited significance in terms of place semiotics and visual semiotics. Figure 6.9 is a nucleic acid test station on the ground plaza next to the restricted entrance, recorded by a social media channel associated with the Chongqing Transport Department. These temporary signs are primarily designed for functional communication rather than aesthetic or place-making purposes. Their role is to convey clear and immediate instructions rather than contribute to the construction of a broader semiotic landscape of a place. As temporary markers that emerged during a crisis period, their placement was flexible and impermanent, shifting in response to changes in epidemic prevention zones. Unlike official long-term signage, which typically reinforces spatial stability and fixed meanings, COVID-19 signs were frequently repositioned or removed in response to changing pandemic conditions. They were commonly produced on foam board or printed paper, and this material choice physically reflected their temporary status. In

this sense, their transient materiality underscored their role as emergency interventions rather than permanent infrastructural elements (Gorter, 2013)



Figure 6. 9: A nucleic acid test station during COVID-19³⁶

As to visual semiotics, a defining characteristic of COVID-19 signs is their heavy reliance on text-based messaging, with minimal use of visual or artistic elements. The lack of visual embellishment is a deliberate design choice that prioritises clarity and urgency. In this sense, COVID-19 signs exemplify a strong pragmatic communicative function, designed to regulate behaviour, guide movement, and enforce public health measures in a direct and authoritative manner (Spolsky & Cooper, 1991).

The authoritative nature of these signs aligns with Foucault's (1979) concept of governmentality, where state power is exercised through discursive and spatial mechanisms to regulate populations. In the context of epidemic control, the linguistic landscape becomes a disciplinary space (Shohamy, 2006), where signage enforces behavioural norms and establishes spatial boundaries for movement and access. During the pandemic, signage played a central role in structuring human interaction in public space. At station entrances and nucleic acid testing sites, the number of on-site

³⁶ From Weibo public post:@重庆邑网通分站区域. April 4, 2022.
<https://weibo.com/7745222511/4754589515256160>

personnel increased substantially. Because staff at entrances and testing stations wore full-body protective gear, their specific roles were often difficult to identify. As a result, signage became essential for guiding passengers on where to go, whom to approach, and what actions to take. For instance, passengers were instructed to present their health codes to staff near entrance signs, and at testing windows they were directed to remove masks and tilt their heads toward medical personnel. These interactions illustrate how signage, interaction order, and spatial organisation were rapidly reconfigured in response to crisis conditions, highlighting the adaptive regulatory function of signage in exceptional public-health contexts.

Placing this phenomenon within the larger sociopolitical and cultural framework of China, the extensive use of temporary epidemic prevention signage aligns with the country's centralised governance model and collectivist social values. As one of the most populous countries in the world, China requires efficient, large-scale regulatory measures to manage public health crises. The widespread deployment of such signage demonstrates the state's ability to implement rapid, highly coordinated interventions in response to emergencies.

Moreover, the emphasis on clear, uniform messaging across different regions reflects the broader cultural priority placed on collective well-being over individual autonomy (Hofstede, 2001). The communicative function of these signs extends beyond instructional guidance. They serve as a visual manifestation of state control, public responsibility, and the expectation of compliance in times of crisis. In contrast to societies where public health measures may be subject to debate or personal discretion, COVID-19 signs in China operate as explicit enforcers of behavioural norms, ensuring a high degree of adherence to public health policies. Accordingly, Guo et al., (2022) found that when Chinese citizens perceive their city government as responsive, they are less concerned about privacy issues and more inclined to support the use of regulations in urban governance.

The characteristics of temporary epidemic prevention signage in China exemplify a unique intersection of linguistic, material, and political semiotics. Unlike long-term signage which shapes the identity of a space over time, these temporary markers are highly situational and regulatory, designed with the primary goal of managing large populations and controlling movement in public spaces. Their flexible placement, impermanent materials, and direct linguistic style highlight their role as instruments of crisis management rather than elements of urban branding or place-making. At the same time, their widespread use reflects deeper sociopolitical structures, including state authority, collectivist values, and top-down governance mechanisms. In this way, these seemingly simple signs offer valuable insight into how language, space, and power interact in moments of societal urgency in public.

After the pandemic, the role of the ground plaza gradually transitioned from a controlled isolation zone back to a public leisure space. The regulated entry channel and most nucleic acid test stations were dismantled. Figure 6.10 shows a former nucleic acid test station on the other side of north ground plaza. When all COVID-19 signs on this station were removed, it was transformed into a service site, but had been removed by the second period data collection.



Figure 6. 10: A former nucleic acid test station, “elderly assistance service platform”

During the post-COVID period and the gradual restoration of its original purpose, the ground plaza continued to carry residual notices relating to public health. Lampposts in the plaza, like that shown in Figure 6.11, were decorated with COVID-prevention reminders in striking red and white colours. These signs alerted passengers that, although stringent control measures had concluded, the pandemic was not entirely over.



Figure 6. 11: The decorated lampposts on the ground plaza in post-COVID, “Mask up, stay clean.”

The semiotic evolution of the north plaza during and after COVID-19 aligns with Pennycook’s (2017) theory of assemblage, which highlights the dynamic interplay between signage, people, and spatial practices. The linguistic landscape of the plaza underwent a transformation parallel to its shifting socio-political context. Once a zone of health surveillance, it gradually re-emerged as a communal site for leisure and social interaction. This transformation was not instantaneous but rather a gradual negotiation of space, function, and meaning. The evolving signage within the plaza serves as a key indicator of these shifts. Initially, COVID-19 signs played an authoritative and regulatory role, dictating movement and behaviour. However, as the pandemic measures eased, these signs either disappeared, were repurposed, or lost their original function, illustrating how semiotic resources adapt to new spatial and social realities.

This adaptation demonstrates a major theme of assemblage theory, which underscores how spaces, texts, and human interactions are constantly being reconfigured in response to new circumstances.

6.4 The ticket checking area: An information-guided efficient passage zone

After walking across the ground plaza, passengers can enter the station building through ticket checking areas. As shown in Figure 6.12 below, Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station has a total of five ticket checking entrances across three floors. The platform level and arrival level have entrances connected to the parking lot and subway station, facilitating quick entry for passengers arriving by metro or private vehicles. After passing through the initial ticket check, passengers undergo a second ticket checking point at their specific boarding gates before boarding the trains. The departure floor has 13 ticket checking gates on each side, totalling 26 gates.

Since the patterns of both ticket checking processes are generally consistent, all ticket checking areas within Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station are treated as the same type of space in this analysis.

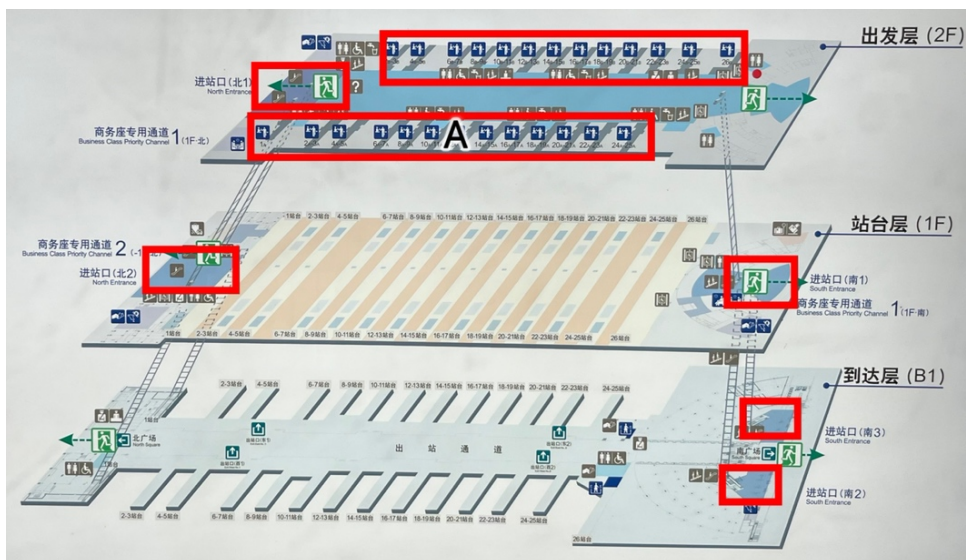


Figure 6. 12: All the ticket checking gates in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station

The ticket checking area is a zone designed to allow passengers to pass through quickly and efficiently. This goal is achieved by the cooperation of accurately placing guiding information and self-service ticket checking machines. Compared to other areas, the categories of signage in the ticket checking area is relatively uniform. In this study, signage observed in the checking was found to predominantly consist of notices and directional signs. Because passengers must move swiftly through this area, signs are highly informative, making geosemiotic analysis relatively straightforward.

Taking gates 12A and 13A in Figure 6.13 as an example, it presents the entire layout of a ticket checking zone in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station, which was also shown as “A” in Figure 6.12. From the perspective of place semiotics, signs at the ticket checking gates are relatively small and densely arranged. The electronic screens displaying current train information are the largest signs in this area, placed overhead to ensure readability for all passengers undergoing ticket checking. Other signs categorise different queuing areas, indicating the locations of queues for passengers using ID cards, other documents, or those holding business-class tickets. A large notice is posted on the wall behind the self-service ticket machines, combining text, images, and colours to clarify which passageway passengers should use. The ground in front of the ticket checking machines is also marked with guiding signs. Lines demarcate four lanes corresponding to four ticket machines. Thus, at the ticket checking entrance, the most prominent signs are for train information and queuing. This arrangement facilitates a more orderly and efficient ticket checking process, which is the primary

function of this area.



Figure 6. 13: Ticket checking gates 12A and 13A on the departure level (2F)

In terms of interaction order, passengers in this zone typically read signage within personal distance (8 inches to 4 feet). Each ticket gate covers a relatively limited area, necessitating queues that result in passengers standing close to one another. The ticket checking area is not designed for prolonged stays. Only passengers scheduled for the same train gather at the gate and during this time they must closely read the signage in this zone. Given their shared destinations and identical actions required, passengers naturally read signs at a relatively close interpersonal distance.

As to visual semiotics, there is not much emphasis placed on aesthetic design within the boarding areas. The primary objective of signage in this area is the rapid and accurate communication of information. Therefore, most signs consist predominantly of plain text, occasionally accompanied by simple icons, such as downward arrows indicating specific passageways. Due to their dense arrangement, the background colours and text on different signs are clearly distinguished using vibrant contrasts, such as bright reds and blues.

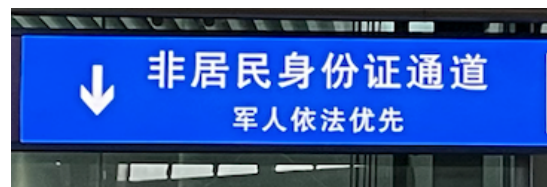
Textual elements within this space complement the physical layout of ticket gates, achieving synergy between signage and infrastructure to ease passenger flow. Text itself predominantly presents straightforward notifications or instructions, usually as single words e.g. “车次” (Train Number), “站台” (Platform), or short phrases e.g. “居民身份证通道” (Resident ID Passage), “商务座专用通道” (Business Class Passage), only a few signs include longer messages. The entry points for manual and business-class channels are closer to the checking machines, providing less space for queuing. For Chinese passengers, using household registration booklets or temporary IDs is uncommon, and business-class seats are limited. Based on the researcher’s experience and observations, very few passengers queue in these two channels. High-speed railway stations adjust the allocation of ticket checking spaces according to actual passenger needs, coordinating closely with clear written guidances for optimal organisation.

During the first data collection period, which covered the Chinese New Year, I took a train heading to Chengdu East Station. As the two major economic centres in Southwest China, there is a high volume of rail travel between Chengdu and Chongqing, with multiple daily departures from Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station at frequent intervals. According to information from the official “12306” railway ticketing platform, on regular days, there are over 70 daily departures from Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station to Chengdu. During peak travel periods such as the Spring Festival, this number can exceed 130 trains per day. Passenger volume peaks dramatically during the Spring Festival travel rush, yet the entire ticket-inspection process typically concludes within approximately twenty minutes. This efficiency is necessary because of the number of departing trains. The inspection process is swift and orderly; passengers are familiar and comfortable with the queuing, ID scanning, and machine-operated procedures, demonstrating a well-established and smooth interaction with this space. Although manual inspections take slightly longer, overall, they do not significantly impede the main passenger flow in adjacent queues.

For international travellers who do not possess a Chinese Resident Identity Card, the manual passage represents the sole viable option for ticket verification in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station. Nevertheless, as the sign in point a “manual lane” shows, the signage currently used to indicate the manual checking lane lacks English translation. Furthermore, the signage in point b “non-resident ID lane”, which notes gate-appropriate types of identification, similarly fails to clarify that foreign travellers are categorised as non-resident ID holders. This lack of language access can cause confusion and hesitation, disrupting how passengers move and making the travel experience less inclusive for those who do not speak Chinese.



a. “manual lane”



b. “non-resident ID lane”

Observations from several boardings show a clear pattern: at the start of each ticket-checking period, a staff member is regularly positioned at the entrance of the manual inspection lane. Their presence at this specific time and place suggests that the station recognises the limits of automated systems and the ongoing need for human support. Unlike automated gates, which can only process standard Chinese ID cards, the manual lane offers a more flexible and responsive option. It allows passengers to interact with staff for help, questions, or confirmation, something especially useful for those who are not familiar with the local system. This kind of human assistance is also common in other international travel settings, such as customs, where foreign travellers often need to go through manual checks because their documents do not match the local system.

This setup shows an important feature of how public spaces are designed: with a mix of automated systems and human support. Automated gates help make the process fast and efficient for local passengers who have standard ID cards. But manual assistance is still necessary to handle different types of documents and travel needs. Right now, the signage at Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station does not fully help connect these two systems. The lack of translations or clear visual signs like icons makes it harder for foreign travellers to understand and shows that the station is still mainly focused on serving local users.

Based on the researcher's observations, most people using the manual lane during the study were domestic passengers using other forms of ID, such as household registration booklets, military cards, or permits for Taiwan residents. This may partly explain why there is little English or multilingual signage—the immediate need for it seems low. However, this pattern does mean inclusive design is not important in the long run. Stations like Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station will likely see more visitors from different language and cultural backgrounds in-line with the city's tourism boom.

6.5 The waiting hall: A passenger-oriented relaxation zone

The next area passengers enter after passing through the initial ticket check is the waiting area, which consists of the waiting hall and public facilities. The waiting area is a transitional space where passengers can rest and prepare before boarding. The waiting area is a passenger-friendly zone with a relaxed atmosphere. It is spacious, housing numerous advertisements, and official service-oriented signage, and consisting of a waiting hall and public facilities on the departure level. The waiting hall is the central area of the departure level. Public facilities such as restrooms and drinking water stations are located next to ticket checking gates.

6.5.1 The public facility area

The signage in public facility areas managed by Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station reflects a unified management style and the station's attentive service attitude. The main function of these public facility areas is to provide passengers with access to restrooms, drinking water, accessible elevators, and guidance information. As shown in Figure 6.3, the icons for restrooms, drinking water, accessible elevators, and stairs are grouped together and are evenly distributed on both sides of the waiting hall and between the ticket gates.

Figure 6.14 shows restrooms and drinking water stations under construction. The construction notice is a temporary sign that will be removed once the construction is done, and the area reopens. In contrast, the signs on the wall in unified style are long-term signages.

From the perspective of place semiotics, permanent signs in public facilities areas are mainly made of durable materials. These signs are thickness and appear somewhat three-dimensional when viewed from the side. One restroom sign is even designed as a three-dimensional triangle standing out from the wall, making it visible to passengers coming from different directions. The durability of signage indicates that the area these signs represent is unlikely to change and will continue to exist in its current form long term.



Figure 6. 14: An under-maintenance area

From the perspective of visual semiotics, signs in public facilities areas share three consistent characteristics: a grey background with white text; an icon on the left and corresponding text on the right. On these signs Chinese characters appear on top with smaller-font English text below. The overall visual presentation is clean and minimalist. A high degree of uniformity across the signs makes it easy for passengers to instantly recognise and interpret these as official signs issued top down by the station authority.

Figure 6.15 shows a close-up of the drinking water area. The two signs on the wall gently remind passengers to be cautious, one warns about the risk of burns, and the other encourages users to keep the area clean. On the water dispenser itself, different colours are used to label the hot and cold-water outlets, alongside a warm reminder to conserve water. All the signs in this area are accompanied by English translations. These signs anticipate issues passengers might encounter in the space, with a bilingual format making them accessible to international travellers.



Figure 6. 15: A hot water area

The content of signs in the public facilities areas reflects two distinct aspects of everyday life in Chinese society. First is the value of frugality. In Chinese culture, thriftiness is considered a virtue and is deeply ingrained through both family upbringing and school education. The notion of thrift has been passed down for generations, shaped by centuries of agrarian life, political movements, and moral teachings that emphasised conservation and modest living (Yan, 2010). “Please save water” is just one practical expression of this value, specifically applied to the act of drawing drinking water. Similar reminders such as save food and save energy can be found throughout everyday life in China, making thrift a cultural principle deeply rooted in the national mindset. Even in today’s era of rapid economic development, the principle of saving resources remains a moral cornerstone. Thus, the signage does not just instruct, it also reinforces a cultural virtue that resonates with many Chinese passengers.

The second aspect is the Chinese habit of drinking tea. Even in a public space like a high-speed railway station, where passengers typically do not stay long, many people still make time to brew a cup of tea to take with them. Unlike in many Western countries

where hot beverages are typically bought from cafés, Chinese passengers carry thermoses and brew their own tea even during short travels. Tea holds a deeply rooted place in Chinese history, culture, and daily life. Originating in China over 2,000 years ago, tea was first valued for its medicinal properties before evolving into a key element of social, spiritual, and cultural practices (Benn, 2015). Tea is a quiet but persistent thread in the rhythm of Chinese life. Its significance reflects broader Chinese values such as harmony, mindfulness, and tradition. The phrase “茶渣入桶” (dispose of tea leaves properly) on the hot water dispenser shown in Figure 6.15, is notably not translated into English, subtly highlighting how drinking tea is a culturally specific practice, closely tied to Chinese daily life.

Overall, through the unified management of signage, thoughtful content design, consideration of common passenger practices, and attention to broader cultural and social contexts, the public service areas of this station are shaped into spaces that are not only convenient and efficient, but also human-centered.

6.5.2 The sitting area

Beyond the public service areas, the seating zones in the waiting hall also feature rich interactions between signage and space which create a relaxing atmosphere for passengers during their wait. Figure 6.16 below displays the overall layout of the waiting hall area, most of the area is filled with rows of connected seating separated by paths leading to ticket checking gates. At the centre is a helping desk and hanging from the ceiling are various advertisements.

From the perspective of place semiotics, the placement of signage in the waiting areas reveals a spatial logic distinct from that of other zones in the station. Here, signage in the form of advertisements is suspended from the ceiling. The departure level at Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station has two floors, but the seating area remains uncovered, creating a vast and open vertical space in the centre of the station.

Large scale hanging advertisements take advantage of this openness and are clearly visible to passengers regardless of whether they are walking or seated, and regardless of location on the first or second floor.



Figure 6. 16: The waiting hall on the departure level (2F)

(16.1: a milk powder advertisement; 16.2: a baijiu advertisement; 16.3: a food advertisement; 16.4: a milk powder advertisement)

In terms of interaction order, the hanging style of the advertisements positions them at a physical and symbolic distance from passengers. These signs are not the core informational signage relevant to station navigation or services; instead, they present commercial content. As such, they do not require direct engagement or interpersonal interaction. Passengers can passively consume the signs' messages while maintaining social distance, with no expectation of dialogue, response, or interaction.

Apart from the ceiling, columns are another major site for advertising displays in the waiting area. Figure 6.17 was taken next to one of the columns in the waiting hall. Many similar columns are located on the departure level. Like hanging advertisements, ads placed beside the columns are also shown through three-dimensional electronic displays. Since passengers will pass directly by these areas, the interaction order when viewing these ads tends to be closer than with overhead signage. However, because there are no seats placed around the columns, passengers generally do not gather or linger near these advertising displays, and therefore still will not engage in close interaction with the signage or with other people nearby when observing it.



Figure 6. 17: A *baijiu* advertising sign beside a column

Nevertheless, these minor differences do not reduce the overall unified function of the advertisements in the waiting area. Both hanging advertisements and column-front displays make strategic use of open space. By featuring every day and local products, they also reinforce a familiar, lived-in feel that helps the waiting area seem more comfortable and to some extent more relaxing. Advertisements across these different

formats also exhibit a high degree of visual semiotic consistency, reinforcing a cohesive visual identity throughout the space.

From the perspective of visual semiotics, although these advertisements occupy large physical spaces, their suspended placement and non-essential content mean that they rely heavily on strategic visual design to attract attention. Based on observations in the waiting area of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station, the advertisements tend to follow two main visual strategies: a preference for bright, eye-catching colours, and a focus on large central imagery. Among the four examples shown in the Figure 6.16 all of them have brightly coloured backgrounds; 16.1–16.3 use bright red while 16.4 uses white. These bold colours are not just for decoration, they also help the ads stand out in a space filled with neutral colours. This smart use of colour makes sure the ads catch people's eyes in the busy transport hub. Besides colour, the ads also have large central images. In every example, the picture of the product or the spokesperson are oversized and take up more than half of the ad space: the liquor ads show huge bottles, the infant formula and bird's nest ads feature large photos of spokespersons. These oversized images do not only look attractive, but also help people quickly understand what the ad is about, even if they do not pay attention to the text.

This type of visual strategy instantiates Lynch's (1960) concept of imageability, which states that things that are easy to see and recognise leave a stronger memory in people's minds. In fast-moving places like train stations, where people only look at things for a few seconds, big and clear visuals help people get the message right away. This strategy also fits with discussions in Gorter (2006) and Shohamy and Gorter (2009) on how languages and signs are used in public spaces, and in arguments that visual elements like logos, colours, and images often communicate more powerfully than text, especially in places with people who speak many different languages.

The majority of advertising data from Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station was collected during the first data collection period. At that stage, a total of 36

advertisements were collected within the waiting area. It is important to note that many of these ads were displayed on digital screens programmed to cycle automatically through multiple advertisements. As a result, some ads were likely shown repeatedly across different locations, while others may have been temporarily visible before being replaced by new content. The fluid nature of digital media introduces challenges for static data collection, and thus, the statistics presented here should be understood as approximate and illustrative, serving primarily as a reference point for discussion rather than an exact quantitative account.

Among the 36 advertisements identified, the three most frequent product categories were: Chinese alcohol, or *baijiu* (8 ads), food-related products (8 ads), and home and lifestyle goods (7 ads). The food and home categories represent broad groupings. Specifically, food ads included infant formula and hotpot soup bases, while home-related ads ranged from home appliances and furniture to interior renovation services. In contrast, *baijiu* stands out as a single, narrowly defined product type surpassing other products in terms of visibility. The reason behind such phenomenon can be traced to tradition Chinese history and culture.

Baijiu, a traditional Chinese distilled spirit, holds deep cultural, social, and symbolic significance in China, and its role becomes especially prominent during the Spring Festival, the most important traditional holiday in the Chinese calendar. Celebrated as a time of family reunion, gift-giving, and social bonding, the Spring Festival provides an ideal context for *baijiu* consumption, both in ritual and everyday form. From a cultural perspective, *baijiu* is more than an alcoholic beverage, it is a symbol of hospitality, respect, and celebration in China (Zheng et al., 2016). In family gatherings and banquets, it is common to offer *baijiu* as a toast to elders, friends, or business associates, often accompanied by ritual phrases wishing for health, prosperity, and good fortune in the coming year. The act of toasting with *baijiu* reflects traditional Confucian values of hierarchy, harmony, and reciprocity.

Economically, the Spring Festival is a peak sales season for baijiu manufacturers. As one of the most popular choices for gifting, premium *baijiu* is often exchanged as a symbol of goodwill or to maintain social and professional networks (Sandhaus, 2019). Socially, *baijiu* plays a role in forging and reinforcing relationships. During the Spring Festival, shared drinking is part of the festive atmosphere, encouraging emotional openness and group cohesion. It also acts as a cultural bridge across generations, with older members of the family often passing on values and stories through the shared experience of drinking *baijiu*.

The presence of *baijiu* in advertisements during this season at public transport hubs is not a coincidence. It matches the drink's strong cultural and commercial importance during the Spring Festival, showing both its role in traditional celebrations and its popularity as a seasonal product. At Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station, the *baijiu* ads placed in the waiting areas clearly reflected what the market was looking for at the time. They also showed how public space, people, and advertising signs interact in meaningful ways. By choosing content that matched the interests and expectations of passengers or travellers, the advertisers were able to share messages that were both relevant and culturally familiar in a space where people are constantly moving. In this case, the strategic placement and thematic selection of advertisements function as communicative acts embedded in space, offering not only commercial information but also participating in the discursive shaping of the waiting area as a site of leisure, consumption, and cultural identity.

6.6 The shopping area: A diverse experiential commercial zone

In the departure level on both sides and the second-floor area, apart from the ticketing gates and public facilities already delineated and discussed, the remaining space is primarily occupied by a variety of small shops and vending machines. The signage in this area displays a notably high degree of bottom-up characteristics, offering considerable freedom and flexibility both in its own design and in its interactions with

passengers and the surrounding space. Together, these elements form a commercially vibrant area that provides diverse experiential opportunities.

Figure 6.18 also appears as Figure 5.16 in Chapter 5 and is re-presented here for analysis from a geosemiotics perspective. It captures a sign located near a staircase on the departure level that connects the first floor to the second floor. This particular sign displays the commercial logos of various shops situated on both floors, with arrows indicating each shop's location. These shops cover a wide range of services, from dining options to shopping, leisure, and banking. This sign exemplifies the diversity of substantial businesses within the waiting area. Global chains and local businesses both compete for consumer attention while also jointly contributing to the thriving commercial atmosphere of this area.



Figure 6. 18: A directional sign near a staircase

From a visual semiotics perspective, most of these commercial logos follow a top-down design format comprising an icon, Chinese text, and English text. The icon typically occupies a central position and is rendered large, thereby drawing immediate attention. Such a layout not only provides visual consistency but also reinforces brand memorability, for instance, the well-known chain brands Starbucks and KFC whose

logos are deeply embedded in the public consciousness and can be recognised almost instantly with just a glance. Beyond this shared characteristic, the commercial logos on the departure level also exhibit creative freedom and independence. They do not adhere to any standardised colour schemes or fonts. Likewise, the textual content of the logos displays substantial variation: some include only Chinese, “名匠优品”; some only English, “Dicos” (a Chinese fast-food chain); some are bilingual, “重庆银行 BANK OF CHONGQING”; some use Traditional Chinese, “暢聚藝術”; and some incorporate Pinyin, “GUJICHAZHUANG”. This linguistic diversity can appeal to multiple consumers including domestic passengers and international travellers accustomed to various writing systems and underscores the interplay of global branding and local market needs. When viewed collectively, these signs offer a visually rich array of scripts, colours, and designs, conveying an aesthetic of thriving commercial vitality. The signage can thus be seen to reflect the interplay between public transportation infrastructure and commercial development.

In addition to brick-and-mortar shops, vending machines are also found throughout waiting area and are analysed here as spaces within a the functionally defined shopping area. In general, these machines are positioned between columns and thruways, ensuring they do not obstruct passenger seating or walking while maintaining high visibility. This placement strategy maximises convenience by making the machines easy to locate and approach without disrupting the flow of traffic.

In terms of the interpersonal distance in interaction order, passengers generally engage with vending machines at a personal distance (18 inches to 4 feet) to tap on a touchscreen or scan a QR code. Given that these actions involve direct, momentary contact with the interface, users naturally step closer to the machine. However, passengers typically remain at a social distance (4 feet to 12 feet) with each other, refraining from approaching too closely while waiting until the previous user has finished. This norm of maintaining personal space not only facilitates smooth operation

but also helps preserve a level of privacy and reduces feelings of crowding, since there is always plenty of room around machines.

Vending machines selling food are commonplace, but this study also identified an atypical vending machine type. Figure 6.19 shows a machine located in the corridor between a ticket checkpoint and a seating area. This particular unit displays the official China Railway logo and is labelled as a “poverty alleviation consumption cabinet”. According to a China Daily report from July 20th, 2021³⁷, this initiative is part of the government’s precision poverty alleviation policy. As early as 2020, the government has set a goal to deploy one million machines nationwide, channelling goods from rural communities into high-traffic transportation nodes such as train stations, airports, and bus stops, which aims to increase market access for products sourced from less developed regions.



Figure 6. 19: A vending machine beside a column, “poverty alleviation”

The strategic placement of these machines in passages not only generates increased visibility and revenue, but also raises public awareness of the broader poverty

³⁷ Source: <https://cnews.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202107/20/WS60f66255a3101e7ce975a837.html>

alleviation campaign. Additionally, the presence of a government-sanctioned vending machine reflects a shift in how public spaces are utilised to advance social policy. With clear information and instructions from the semiotic resources on this machine, passengers are delivered the message that they can choose to support underprivileged regions in their spending. These machines underscore the potential of a large-scale transport hub to serve as conduit for social and economic development, blending commercial activity with public welfare objectives. At the same time, they enrich passengers' understanding of social issues and add meaning to consumption.

The commercial area of Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station also features other vending machine services, providing items such as power banks, masks, and books. Figure 6.20 is a power bank machine placed between a column and the thruway of a commercial area. In China, small-scale power bank machines are a familiar sight. These machines can be easily placed on a countertop and typically display a QR code for rental transactions.



Figure 6. 20: A power bank rental machine beside a column

Nevertheless, this power bank machine observed in this area is comparable in size to a standard food vending machine. It includes an electronic touchscreen on the upper section and a compartment holding up to fifty power banks below. By dedicating ample space to a digital interface, the machine not only captures passengers' attention but also ensures that users can clearly see the QR codes and on-screen instructions.

Oversized power bank rental machines reflect both the substantial flow of passengers through Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station and the strong demand for portable chargers. At the time the photograph was taken, only around ten power banks were left, with the remaining slots empty. Over the years, power bank rental machines have become increasingly prevalent across public spaces in China, reflecting both the rapid expansion of the country's "sharing economy" (Gao & Li, 2020) and a growing reliance on mobile devices. From a passenger perspective, power bank rental machines offer enhanced convenience and peace of mind in this railway station.

A commonality of these vending machine is that they rely heavily on mobile payment systems, which are ubiquitous in China (Huang et al., 2020). By scanning a QR code, users can easily buy products or unlock and return charging devices, facilitating transactions that are both fast and cashless. Beyond this point, these services highlight new forms of public-private collaboration. Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station recognised the added value these machines bring in increasing user satisfaction and potentially generating additional revenue streams. Innovative interactions between semiotic resources and devices not only meet passenger' practical needs but have also influence how public spaces are commercialised and how individual activities are reshaped in an increasingly mobile-dependent society.

6.7 The boarding area: An organised crowd diversion zone

As departure time approaches, passengers from the previously described areas converge for ticket inspection and then move to the platform to await boarding. Although the

platform is relatively small and contains fewer signs than other station zones, it is operationally critical. Because boarding and alighting for the same service must be completed in a confined space within a short time window, platform signage is designed to enable fast, orderly circulation by guiding passengers efficiently, reducing congestion, and channeling flows to the correct doors and exits.

After the second ticket check, passengers boarding the train encounter a large overhead sign immediately upon entering the platform area (Figure 6.21). This sign contains the key information that every passenger needs: train number, departure time, and origin and destination.



Figure 6. 21: An information screen on the ceiling of the platform level

These messages are highlighted in bright yellow and green against a darker background and surrounding text, enabling quick visual confirmation even in a crowded setting. The sign also presents boarding instructions in red, directing passengers to form two opposing flows, forward or backward, depending on their carriage locations. This spatially organised guidance improves boarding efficiency and helps prevent bottlenecks on a narrow platform. At the same time, the sign includes safety warnings,

such as cautions about standing near the platform edge, indicating that crowd management and risk prevention are integrated into institutional design. From the emplacement perspective, the sign's placement above the platform aligns with passengers' movement path as they descend the stairs after ticket checking. The placement of similar signs at regular intervals along the platform further reinforces this regulatory function, maintaining guidance and accessibility as passengers disperse toward different carriages.

Ground-level signage, as shown in Figure 6.22 also contributes to crowd diversion on the platform. As shown in the photo, three different carriage-positioning markers appear at the same location on the platform. Each marker is differentiated by color and the number of carriages, corresponding to stopping positions of different trains. The wording on the screen in Figure 6.21, for example, "Queue up according to the green landmark", makes the intended action after seeing Figure 6.22 immediately clear and helps passengers identify which marker they should follow.

In addition, each marker does more than indicate the carriage number for that spot: it also points to the directions of other carriages, enabling passengers walking past to confirm their orientation and adjust their position if necessary. By relying on a simple, highly legible system, especially color-coding, these signs can distribute large passenger volumes efficiently across the platform, reducing clustering and improving both boarding efficiency and overall travel experience. In this way, they illustrate the strategic role of signage in transportation settings, where rapid, safe, and orderly movement is essential. Based on my own passenger experience, the visual guidance created through the combination of colours and numbers was sufficiently clear for the vast majority of passengers. After reading the instructions independently, passengers were able to identify their designated boarding points on their own. Even before the

train arrived at the station, orderly queues had already formed in front of the signs indicating the position of each carriage.

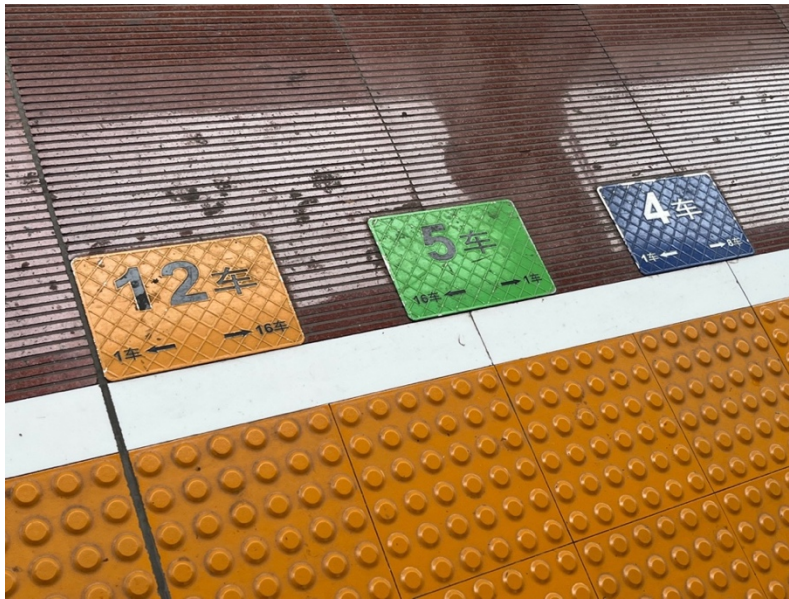


Figure 6. 22: Signs on the ground of platform level

Meanwhile, on-site staff use loudspeakers to repeat train information, caution passengers who approach the platform edge, and assist those who need help. In parallel, high-speed railway stations broadcast automated platform announcements that reiterate relevant train information and deliver routine safety reminders. These oral messages do not simply duplicate the written signs; they function as an additional channel that can reach passengers who are distracted, unfamiliar with the environment, or unable to access signage easily because of crowding, luggage, or limited sightlines. This suggests that the platform environment supports a form of “self-service” mobility, with passengers positioned as competent individuals who can read, interpret, and act on semiotic prompts. In this sense, the platform operates through a balance between autonomy and supervision. Passengers manage their own trajectories, but within an infrastructure that subtly channels behaviour and reduces uncertainty.

From the perspective of arriving passengers, as displayed in Figure 6.23, the station relies on repeated exit and transfer direction signs to support rapid circulation after arrival. These signs follow a consistent, minimal design which combines Chinese and English keywords with arrow icons, presenting information and direction in an explicit form that can be processed quickly while walking. In some cases, simple icons for “Exit” or “Transfer” are also present, strengthening the signs’ indexical function and improving comprehension for passengers with different language backgrounds or varying levels of familiarity with the station. Crucially, the effectiveness of these signs lies not only in their content but also in their strategic emplacement. Signs are repeatedly positioned along arriving passengers’ movement paths, from overhead in to on walls aligned with train doors. This repetition functions as a form of reassurance: even if one sign is missed due to crowding, passenger oversight, or limited visibility, the next sign quickly re-establishes orientation. In a high-density environment, this repetition of signage reduces hesitation and helps maintain a steady flow of passengers.



Figure 6. 23: View of the platform level from passengers

The station's physical infrastructure further supports the orderly operation by offering multiple routes to the exit. Arriving passengers can choose stairs, escalators, or elevators based on comfort and mobility needs, which also gives the network greater control over overall movement. When one route becomes congested, alternative paths remain available, allowing large volumes of arriving passengers to disperse efficiently within a short time. When considered alongside the boarding process, the station design also addresses the brief moments when two opposing flows, arriving and departing passengers, intersect. Although such intersection can easily produce friction, the combination of repeated directional signage and multiple egress routes channels passengers into differentiated trajectories. As a result, even under conditions of heavy foot traffic, movement remains orderly and fast: passengers receive clear prompts about where to go. These prompts are encountered at multiple points, allowing passengers to select routes and thereby distributing the crowd rather than concentrating it.

An orderly passenger experience on the platform is produced through the interlocking of semiotic resources, infrastructures, spatial arrangement, and participants. Overhead signs and ground markings are placed in alignment with passengers' visual field as they descend via stairs or elevators, ensuring that critical information is encountered. Staff presence and announcements provide real-time assistance through rephrasing key instructions, addressing emerging risks, and offering assistance to those who may not fit the typical passenger profile such as elderly passengers, or people with disabilities. At the same time, most passengers complete boarding and arrival independently, and follow the guidance provided by signage and facilities in an orderly manner even under conditions of heavy passenger flow.

Together, these elements form a coherent crowd-management assemblage in which written, visual, and spoken modes reinforce one another. The result is a heightened sense of efficient circulation, predictability, and safety, which are central to passenger experience in high-density transport settings.

6.8 The arrival level: An integrated interchange zone

The arrival level primarily consists of exit passageways and exits themselves. Exit passageways connect all platforms, guiding arriving passengers to leave in an orderly manner. Exits are equipped with various public facilities, especially the southern exit which not only serves multiple functions but also reinforces Chongqing’s urban image. Together, these two areas form a multifunctional and integrated interchange zone.



Figure 6. 24: Floor plan of arrival level

Figure 6.24 is a diagram of the arrival level area shown in Figure 3. After the train arrives, all passengers must take the elevators to the arrival level and then exit through one of four designated exits. After exiting, the northern side leads to the North Square, while the southern side leads to the South Square. Notably, the southern exit is a much larger area. The area enclosed by the curved dashed line in the figure marks the connection to the Chongqing North Station South Square metro station, where metros and high-speed trains share a common entrance and exit area. Both Line 4 and Line 10 pass through this area, allowing passengers to transfer seamlessly between the train and metro. Metro passengers can arrive and enter the high-speed railway station directly through the ticket gates and then take the elevator to the departure level; similarly, arriving high-speed railway passengers can quickly access the metro. In addition, this area connects to bus stops, parking lots, and taxi stands, all of which are accessible via elevators, stairs, and other passages from the arrival level. This design enables fast

transitions between different modes of transportation within a large public transport hub.

In the interchange area, the most common types of signage are notices and directional signs. These are distributed throughout the entire space and are visible from the moment passengers arrive on the platform to when they exit the station. These two types of signs differ slightly in terms of place semiotics. Notices are typically placed at the exact locations where an action is expected to occur, often at or below eye level. For example, elevator safety instructions are posted on the floor at the entrance of the elevator. This placement allows passengers to receive information immediately before boarding and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Notices in this area exhibit a highly contextualised character through delivering precise information in precisely the right location. Figure 6.25, for instance, is posted on a pillar in the overlapping area between the high-speed railway and metro stations, designating the location as “Meeting Point 4”.



Figure 6. 25: A notice on a column in the interchange area

Like many pillars in this area, this sign assigns a specific spatial identity and function to a specific spot, thereby transforming the possible practices of passengers in that space.

The southern interchange area connects various modes of transport and is also where people often wait to pick up arriving passengers. During peak hours, this area accommodates high passenger volume, making it difficult for individuals to locate each other. Establishing such a meeting point solves this problem by shifting the meeting practice from “looking for someone in a crowd” to “finding a clearly marked location.”

The placement of notices in this area is a concrete example of emplacement, where the position of the sign is perfectly aligned with the context and practices of the physical space in which it appears. Directional signs are similarly emplaced, generally being placed along the route leading to the destination, positioned above eye level and in unobstructed locations. This ensures that passengers coming from different directions can easily look up, see directions clearly, and plan their route in advance.

In terms of authorship, both types of signs in the interchange area are top-down, being produced and managed by the high-speed railway station. However, in terms of visual semiotics, the notices are primarily tailored to their respective contexts, lacking a unified style and connection between each other. Most directional signs exhibit a consistent visual appearance, matching that exemplified by the sign in Figure 6.23. They feature an icon on the left with text on the right, arranged with Chinese on top and English below.

In this physically functional area, which is dominated by efficient and informative signage, the symbolic function of reinforcing the city’s image is also introduced through localised contents on signage. Figure 6.26 is an advertisement for a local bottled water brand located in a passageway in this area. Interestingly, the slogan employs characters reflecting a classic Chongqing dialect pronunciation. The pronunciation of “嘍” under this context means “this” in Chongqing dialect, and “逗” means “just want to” or “must”. Therefore, the actual meaning of the phrase is “this summer, just want to / must drink this water”. These two dialect expressions are very commonly used in the

everyday speech of local residents and are familiar to passengers from other areas of China as representative of the Chongqing dialect.



Figure 6. 26: An advertising sign in the arrival level, “This summer, drink Xiannüshan Xuequan”

As Chinese is a pictographic script, this type of localised language usage relies on the phonetic associations of written characters, rather than their meanings. As a result, characters with similar pronunciations are typically used to represent the intended sounds in written form. If one only looks at the literal text, the characters themselves convey entirely different meanings. Therefore, the slogan in the ad is not a semantically coherent phrase on its own. However, when placed within the linguistic context of Chongqing, where these pronunciations are already deeply familiar to local residents and some non-locals, it does not hinder passengers’ understanding of its connotation. In fact, the effectiveness of the advertisement is even enhanced by the use of this playful dialectal expression, making it more vivid and memorable.

From a semiotic perspective, this strategy introduces a layer of symbolic meaning that goes beyond the purely commercial role of this sign through representing the local culture and identity. Using local dialect and humour builds familiarity, pride, and belonging among residents, while signalling to outsiders that they're entering a place with its own distinct character.

More importantly, these signs contribute meaningfully to the localisation of LLs and city branding. In sum, by incorporating local language into transport and advertising signage, Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station positions itself not only a transit hub but turning generic interchange spaces into cultural gateways where everyday speech expresses the city's identity.

On the other side of the arrival-level interchange area, a similar strategy of localisation and city branding was recorded. Figure 6.27 shows a staircase passageway connecting the north-side exit of the departure level to the North Square. Along both walls of this stairwell, a series of historical photographs of Chongqing are displayed. These images change in alignment with the vertical movement of the stairway and elevator, remaining consistently at eye level for passengers moving through the space.

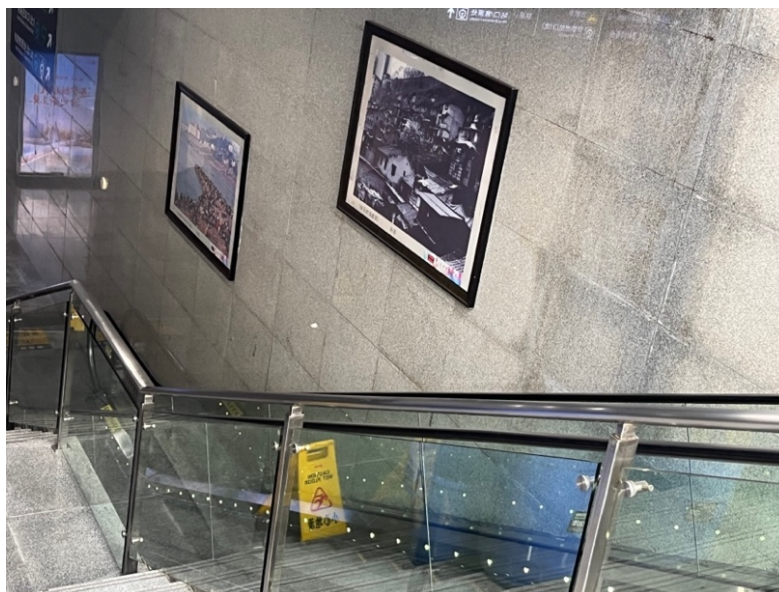


Figure 6. 27: A staircase between the arrival level and north ground plaza



a. “Hongyadong in inclined sun.”

b. “Forever submerged Chaotianmen spit.”)

The photographs depict well-known Chongqing landmarks, such as the Chaotianmen and Hongyadong wharfs, as they appeared many years ago. Although the dates of these photos are not explicitly indicated, the black-and-white colour and low-rise building in 6.27.a, and the image of Chaotianmen in 6.27.b both indicate an earlier stage in the city’s development, when the urban centre lacked high-rise buildings. The contrast with today’s modern cityscape creates a strong sense of “old Chongqing”, rich in a sense of retro aesthetics.

For local residents, especially those who have lived through Chongqing’s transformation, these photos evoke personal memories and shared urban experiences. Scenes like the Chaotianmen riverside when it was just a stretch of sandbank, remind residents of families and friends who gathered there for activities. For younger generations, these images may represent the youthful era of their parents or grandparents, turning the photographs into intergenerational memory bridges. By integrating these images into the interchange areas, where passengers are either returning to or departing from their hometown, the display successfully taps into a nostalgic feeling that reinforces the sense of identity shared by Chongqing locals. In this way, a functional stairway becomes a narrative space where the emotional landscape of the city is communicated through visual memory.

For non-local passengers or travellers, these photographs serve another purpose: they offer a glimpse into the authentic historical life of the city, far beyond the tourist postcard version. Through these images, passengers can gain a more nuanced understanding of Chongqing's urban evolution and its people. This design choice reflects the thoughtful consideration and hospitality of the station's management, positioning the station not merely as a transit point, but as a cultural ambassador of the city.

In terms of city branding, this approach highlights how visual storytelling and localised memory can be integrated into even the most utilitarian of urban infrastructures. It shows how emotional resonance, and cultural specificity can elevate a space's function, contributing to the branding of Chongqing as a city that values its heritage, warmth, and lived history.

6.9 Summary

This chapter focused on describing the role of different types of signage within functional zones of the Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station. Based on two rounds of data collection conducted roughly a year apart, this large-scale multifunctional public transport hub was divided into six functional zones mirroring the sequence of experiences departing passengers have entering the station at the ground plaza, going through the entrance and checking tickets, walking through the waiting area, shopping area, and boarding area, as well as the experience of arriving passengers in the arrival interchange area. The LL in each zone displays distinct characteristics, shaped by the functional needs of passengers and the station's management of passengers in each area. For instance, the ticket-checking area features efficient and precise top-down notices, while in the shopping area signage is diverse and visually rich, reflecting the commercial nature of space.

Within this large assemblage, various spatial factors interact with signage to enable the smooth operation of the public transport hub. The guidance provided by signage, the application of self-service facilities, the duties of staff, and passengers' adherence to rules together form a cohesive process that operates seamlessly within the space. During the COVID-19 when public transport posed a high potential risk of infection, designated monitoring zones maintained public travel needs and reflected the resilience of the transport hub.

By situating observations and analysis within the historical, cultural, and social context of Chongqing, the study reveals that this transportation hub also carries symbolic meanings beyond its physical functions. For instance, photographs of old Chongqing may not serve core transport-related functions and may not convey key information, but when localised in a way that aligns with the city's geographic and historical context, they become a situated part of Chongqing's public space, contributing to the construction of city branding. This demonstrates the dynamic and adaptable nature of signage in the urban context, showing how it can continuously evolve and integrate with dynamic functions of zones.

Overall, by dividing a large, multifunctional assemblage into a series of relatively small, distinct zones, the analysis given here has traced how the core function of each space is produced and connected to maintain mobility. Through the interaction of emplacement and visibility of signs and other components, with an emphasis on infrastructures and people in participation, this chapter also shows how these interactions can be negotiated and reconfigured particularly during a crisis period, thereby revealing the spatial differences and functional contrasts between zones within the railway station, and produces a multilayered and dynamic interpretation of a transport hub.

Affective Regimes in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 examined the concept of assemblage using the Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station as a case study. It depicted the railway station as a large-scale, multifunctional public hub, and identified various functional zones within the station by interpreting interactions among signs, space, people, infrastructures, and other semiotic resources. Beyond having strictly physical functions, the railway station was also shown to embody the social, historical, and cultural background of Chongqing.

Chapter 7 delves into the interaction between signage and affect in Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport (CKG) through an examination of offline and online contexts. The analytical framework employed in this chapter draws on Wee and Goh's (2019) concept of affective regimes and Bourdieusian sociology. Integrating affective regimes into LL research enriches the field by adding a crucial analytical layer focused on affect. This approach shifts the discussion from a purely linguistic or semiotic analysis to one that also considers the emotional and psychological impact of public signage on a broad range of individuals. Bourdieusian sociology offers a lens to examine how affective regimes are socially structured, circulated, reproduced, and legitimised. In particular, the notion of habitus is employed here to interpret affective responses as embodied

social and cultural practices, and the notion of capital is employed to demonstrate how affects are structured.

As a medium of communication, LL can achieve specific goals by influencing and managing readers' cognition and affect (Lang & Numtong, 2024). Stroud and Jegels (2014) suggest that the transformation of a space into a meaningful place fundamentally relies on the creation, narration, and realisation of particular emotional impacts, achieved through direct or indirect interactions with symbolic elements present in the environment.

Consequently, researchers have proposed extending the concept of "place" in LL studies to encompass both physical and digital environments (Kellerman, 2010, 2016; Hiippala et al., 2019). The semiotic analytical units considered in this chapter include affective cues identified in collected photographic data; passengers' emotions and behaviours as reflected in their social media posts, and relevant social norms or ideologies contextual to the research setting. In terms of social media posts, this study draws on geotagged posts from Weibo, a leading Chinese social media platform, which serves as a large-scale dataset and public corpus for capturing real-time social dynamics in online discourse (e.g., Wang et al., 2020; Chen & Gao, 2023; Zheng et al., 2024; Bao, 2025). The common practice of tagging geographical locations in social media posts via mobile devices has made geotagged content a valuable resource for documenting user interactions with physical locations (Hu et al., 2015). In the present study, 200 Weibo posts were collected from categories of "热门" (popular) by searching the name and location of CKG, following the display order automatically. Since the online data demonstrated in this chapter began after the on-site data collection had concluded, the timeline of Weibo posts ranges from 2024 to 2025. These posts were used as secondary data sources and were coded based on the presence of affective elements found in the text, images, and comments for further discussion.

In total four affective regime categories are identified in CKG: hospitality, conviviality, romance, and nostalgia. The service-oriented signages and the immersive experiences offered by CKG reflect a strong affective regime of hospitality. Building on Wee and Goh’s (2019) interpretation of conviviality in a “friendly third place”, this research recognises CKG as a neutral public place at where all passengers are equal. Drawing on Wee and Goh (2019)’s discussion of romance, and analysing popular geotagged Weibo posts, the study identifies a romantic affective bond that emerges in both online and offline fan-related activities. Lastly, Yao’s (2025) exploration of nostalgia in a Chinese restaurant in Melbourne provides a valuable framework for understanding the nostalgic atmosphere cultivated at CKG.

Among the 331 signs collected from CKG, 280 were found to contain affective elements or materials. Specifically, 227 were coded as hospitality, 99 as conviviality, and 14 as nostalgia. 151 out of 200 Weibo posts were coded and categorised into three affective themes: 76 as hospitality, from the official service information and passengers’ travel experiences; 67 as romance, largely generated through celebrity-related and star-chasing behaviours; and 8 as conviviality, towards the construction of a co-exist space. Table 7.1 presents coding methods and the integration of both online and offline data. Hospitality was the most frequently observed affect in the CKG data, followed by conviviality, romance, and nostalgia. Although romance and nostalgia appeared less frequently, they still account for a meaningful proportion of the overall number of affective expressions.

Table 7. 1: Number and coding scheme of identified affective regimes

Affective regime	Number			Coded elements/materials
	physical	online	total	
Hospitality	227	76	303	Services
				Welcome information

				Immersive experience
Conviviality	99	8	107	Respect and courtesy
				Conflict avoidance
				Order and safety
Romance		67	67	Fan support/Star chasing activity
Nostalgia	14		14	Past time and life
				Homesick feeling

Different groups may experience distinct emotional responses within the regimes identified here. Therefore, some signs or materials may have been coded more than once to reflect varying affective experiences among passengers with different identities. These findings align with those of Wee and Goh (2019), as well as Yao (2025), who suggest that affective regimes can overlap and operate simultaneously within the same space. Finally, Weibo is a large social platform, and as this study analysed only 200 posts, the quantitative results presented in this chapter are intended for reference only. The main aim of this chapter is to explore what affective regimes exist and how they are elicited, normalised and circulated, using a qualitative approach.

7.2 Hospitality: Conditioned immersive local experience

Hospitality is a notion been frequently examined in tourism studies, which often framing it as both an economic transaction and a cultural relationship. Lynch et al. (2011) argued that hospitality is an independent area of research, while also emphasizing that exploring diverse ways of thinking about and practicing hospitality can significantly benefit tourism research. In the context of tourism-focused LL, the notion of hospitality is primarily examined through how language is used to welcome and communicate with tourists (Doering & Kishi, 2022). As a major tourist transit site

in Chongqing, signage and semiotic resources in CKG targeting tourists can also be considered as elements of a tourism-centred LL.

Derrida's (2005) theory of hospitality offers a valuable critical framework for analysing signage and interactions in public spaces from the perspective of host and guest in this section. His work brings attention to the inherent contradictions and tensions within hospitality practices, particularly in the context of tourism LLs. Central to Derrida's (2005) theory is the idea that hospitality is never entirely unconditional; it is always shaped by the host's language, norms, and cultural expectations, which establish the terms of welcome. These preconditions, while necessary for order and identity, also serve to define boundaries which place the guest in a position of dependence. Guests then become "hostages" to the rules and frameworks imposed by the host. Following this lens, this section will explore the practice of hospitality in CKG emphasising the selectively inclusive elements of the LL.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the presence of bi/multilingual signage in Chongqing's public transport hubs can be seen as an indicator of the city's attitude toward hospitality. Translated content on signages convey a welcoming and friendly attitude toward non-Chinese speakers in Chongqing. Among the transport hubs examined in this study, CKG demonstrates the highest degree (79.88%) of bi/multilingualism in its LL, which helps explain why signs reflecting hospitality make up the largest category of affective regime. According to Derrida's theory (2005), even though the small number of untranslated signs in CKG may symbolically exclude non-Chinese speakers, the vast majority of informational and functional signs in CKG have been fully translated (75.32%), indicating that, in most cases CKG shows consideration and openness toward international travellers as hosts. Translated signs, as well as their widespread placement throughout the airport, can be seen as concrete expressions of hospitality. Nevertheless, examining languages alone is not enough to fully understand how hospitality is constructed and practiced in CKG. In this section, greater attention is given to the

customised services that CKG provides to different types of travellers, the active output of cultural icons through immersive experiences, and the airport’s human-centred aim, which more fully reflect the site’s role as a host.

7.2.1 Customised services for distinct passenger groups

CKG’s hospitality is reflected in the attention and assistance it provides to certain special passenger groups. As shown in the Figure 7.1, a large three-dimensional sign is placed at one of the entrances of Terminal 3 to provide information about special assistance. The sign features a solid blue background with black text, making it visually striking and easy to notice. At the centre, the main theme “special assistance” is prominently displayed. Above the text, several simple figure icons illustrate the service targets, allowing viewers to quickly identify the groups being addressed. The text below explains in detail that this service area is designed to support elderly passengers, people with disabilities, pregnant women, passengers with children, as well as emergency and first-time travellers. The specific location and contact number of the service area are also provided.



Figure 7. 1: A notice of special assistance at the entrance of Terminal 3

As a major transportation hub responsible for serving large volumes of passengers each day, CKG's attention to smaller passenger groups with limited mobility or special needs demonstrates a deliberate ethical concern within an efficiency-driven environment. Notably, the complete English translation of the signage removes language as a barrier, ensuring that access to assistance is based solely on a passenger's physical or situational condition, rather than on language skills or cultural background. In doing so, CKG promotes inclusivity through practical design.

This sign and the service itself are strong expressions of hospitality. They emphasise that the airport functions not only as a space for transit but also as a site where ethical considerations and moral responsibilities toward more vulnerable travellers are actively recognised. Drawing on Derrida (2005), such services reflect a form of conditional openness and the morality in hospitality. In this sense, CKG's approach reflects a targeted and thoughtful form of inclusion, reinforcing the airport's passenger-focused aim.

In addition to providing support for smaller groups of passengers, CKG also offers services aimed at improving the travel experience of the majority of travellers. One such measure is the establishment of separate security check channels for men and women. The effectiveness of this arrangement is illustrated in a passenger's Weibo post (see Figure 7.2), which received highly positive feedback. The photos show the security checkpoint divided into a "Men's Channel" and a "Women's Channel", alongside clear text instructions, the design also incorporates the widely recognised gendered colours of blue and pink, giving passengers explicit visual guidance. Furthermore, each channel is staffed by personnel from the corresponding gender. The passengers in the picture are shown queuing in an orderly manner, following the gender-specific instructions without any signs of crowding or confusion.



Figure 7. 2: A Weibo post of the gendered channels in CKG

The user who made the post strongly praised the airport’s setup by giving a “点赞” (thumbs up) and expressing surprise “竟然”(unexpected), noting that such measures are not common in airports across China. In the comment area, other users voiced support. One user noted that the separation prevents uncomfortable situations sometimes caused by unisex procedures: “女性朋友过安检再也不会尴尬了” (Female passengers no longer feel embarrassed when going through security checks). Another user emphasised that the arrangement improved efficiency by making the process smoother and faster: “通道细分之后效率更高了” (Efficiency has increased following division of the channels), and expressed an interest in visiting Chongqing to experience it himself.

From the perspective of the host, the implementation of gender-specific security check channels at CKG represents a form of regulated hospitality. While the measure does not exclude any individual based on nationality or identity, it does establish boundaries by gender and requires guests to recognise and comply with these rules. In line with Derrida's (2005) theory of hospitality, such phenomenon reflects the inherent tension between unconditional welcome and the conditions imposed by the host. As Derrida (2005) argues, true hospitality always involves a paradox: to host is to offer openness, but also to exercise control over the space and its rules. In this case, the boundary is both symbolic and practical, asking passengers to follow gender-based procedures for the sake of efficiency, privacy, and comfort. From the guest's perspective, as observed on the public platform Weibo, at least some passengers have responded positively to this arrangement. No critical or opposing views were recorded in this study, suggesting that the conditions set by the host were understood and accepted by the guests.

Through measures such as clear top-down signage, colour-coding, and gender-aligned staffing, CKG demonstrates a carefully structured form of hospitality which balances openness with order, and consideration with regulation. In doing so, it reflects a host who is both attentive to individual needs and committed to maintaining a functional, public space.

7.2.2 Positive output of local culture

Another strategy to enhance the affective elements of hospitality in CKG involves showcasing local culture. One notable example is a corridor in the T3 terminal that features wall displays dedicated to the Chongqing dialect (Figure 7.3). This LL area presents a curated selection of authentic, everyday expressions commonly used by local residents. The title of the display “重庆言子”(Chongqing dialect) uses the local term “dialect” to refer specifically to lexical forms that are representative of regional characteristics, rather than to language in a general sense.

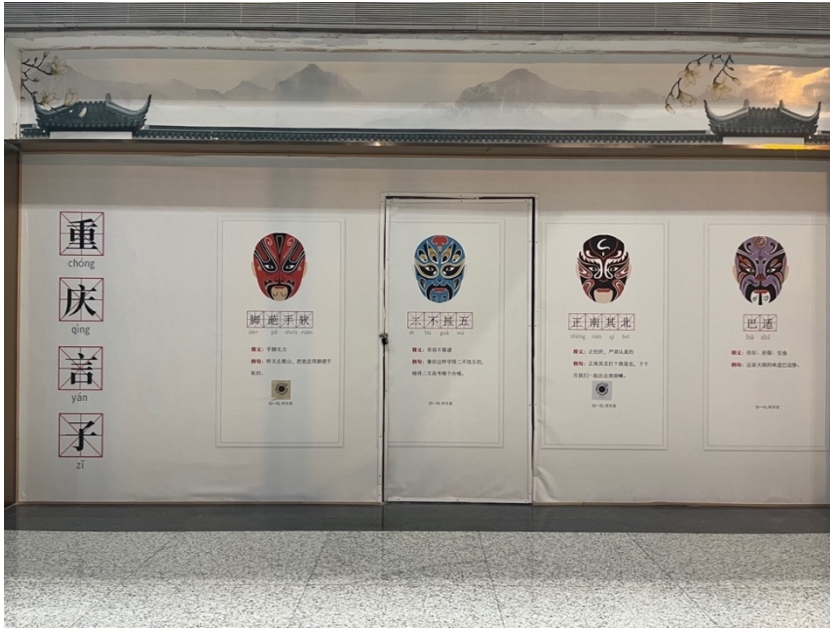


Figure 7. 3: A Corridor featuring Chongqing dialect teaching in Terminal 3

The wall shown in Figure 7.3 includes expressions that describe various states and physical actions. For instance, in the first row shown in the picture, “二不挂五” (èr bù guà wǔ, sloppy and slovenly) conveys a sense of unreliability, while “正南其北” (zhèng nán qí běi, serious) describes a serious or solemn attitude. The lower row illustrates typical actions such as drowsiness, snoring, distraction, and lying down. Despite the nationwide promotion of Mandarin, Chongqing dialect remains the dominant language in everyday communication among local residents in Chongqing (He, 2011). Dai and Gardner (2024) found that high school students in Chongqing still place high value on their local dialect, viewing it as both a symbol of identity and a source of emotional attachment. The words featured in this display are not abstract or symbolic, but rather practical, highly used expressions drawn from everyday life in Chongqing. Each term is accompanied by Pinyin, a definition, and an example sentence, guiding visitors through pronunciation, meaning, and usage.

From a visual semiotics perspective, the display integrates both localised and broader Chinese cultural symbols. Each character is placed within a grid commonly used for

practicing Chinese writing, and the following explanations and example sentences are presented in the format commonly used by the *Xinhua Dictionary*³⁸: character/word – definition – example sentence. This sequence is widely recognised and familiar to Chinese learners. The visual cues associated with standard language education make the signs an effective structure for understanding Chinese vocabulary and reflect the sincerity of the effort to promote and educate visitors about the local dialect. Each dialect term is paired with a mask referencing Sichuan opera, a key cultural tradition in the Sichuan-Chongqing region. Although Chongqing became an independent municipality in 1997, Sichuan opera remains a strong cultural symbol that continues to represent regional identity (Li & Seekhunlio, 2024). The background imagery at the top of the signs includes traditional Chinese architecture and mountain iconography, which evoke a classic painting aesthetic (Guan, 2024). Beyond visual elements, the display also incorporates auditory semiotic resources. QR codes allow visitors to access recordings of authentic pronunciation and intonation, engaging both visual and auditory senses.

As a widely recognised “internet-famous city” on Chinese social media, Chongqing’s regional culture, and especially its dialect, have received significant public attention. The visibility of Chongqing dialect has further increased due to its use in popular television programs, such as the rapper Zhou Yan (stage name “Gai”), who won a national competition performing in Chongqing dialect. These factors have contributed to the dialect becoming a key element of the city’s identity. Therefore, providing domestic visitors with opportunities to experience the richness and practicality of Chongqing dialect at the airport serves not only as cultural education but also as a gesture of warmth and hospitality.

At the same time, to some extent this set of large signs in the international terminal building does reflect an exclusivity and conditioned hospitality toward international

³⁸ <https://bjzs.vdict.com.cn/SY>

tourists. None of the text or QR codes are accompanied by English translations. Although foreign visitors with some background in traditional Chinese architecture or Chinese opera might recognise elements of Chinese culture in the design, they are unlikely to grasp the central theme and appreciate the local dialect and its linguistic charm. Without access to the pronunciation, definitions, and example sentences, they miss the humour and cultural richness conveyed by the content. This lack of accessibility creates a language and cultural barrier, leading to a diminished experience for international visitors who do not share the necessary linguistic and cultural preconditions.

7.2.3 Construction of city image

In addition to reinforcing connections with traditional culture, CKG also promote urban symbols which actively strengthen the connection with tourists, such as taxis. As noted earlier, Chongqing's distinctive mountainous terrain creates a challenging driving environment. It is often joked online that Chongqing is a city where even navigation systems fail. As a result, local taxis are humorously referred to as "Yellow Ferraris" because of they are uniformly in bright yellow colour. This nickname reflects not only the skilled driving of taxi drivers who have mastered the city's complex roads, but also the bold and energetic personalities often seen in locals, all of which contribute to an enjoyable interpretation. This symbol captures both the geographical and cultural uniqueness of Chongqing and helps construct a modern urban identity for the city as a semiotic resource.

At CKG, an officially designated taxi pick-up area is located beneath the overpass connecting Terminal 3 and the parking structure. Passengers arriving at the terminal can enjoy a panoramic view of this area as they pass overhead. The striking scene of bright yellow taxis lined up in an orderly fashion has gradually become a popular photo spot at CKG, drawing visitors who come specifically to take pictures. Recognizing this trend, CKG marked the best vantage points on the overpass for photography. Figure 7.4

shows two popular Weibo posts featuring multiple overhead shots from this location, make use of the phrase “Yellow Ferrari” in texts to receive views and likes. This taxi queue scene has clearly become a distinctive visual icon for CKG. It not only sets CKG apart from other airports but also serves as a recognizable symbol that directly connects to the identity of the city of Chongqing.

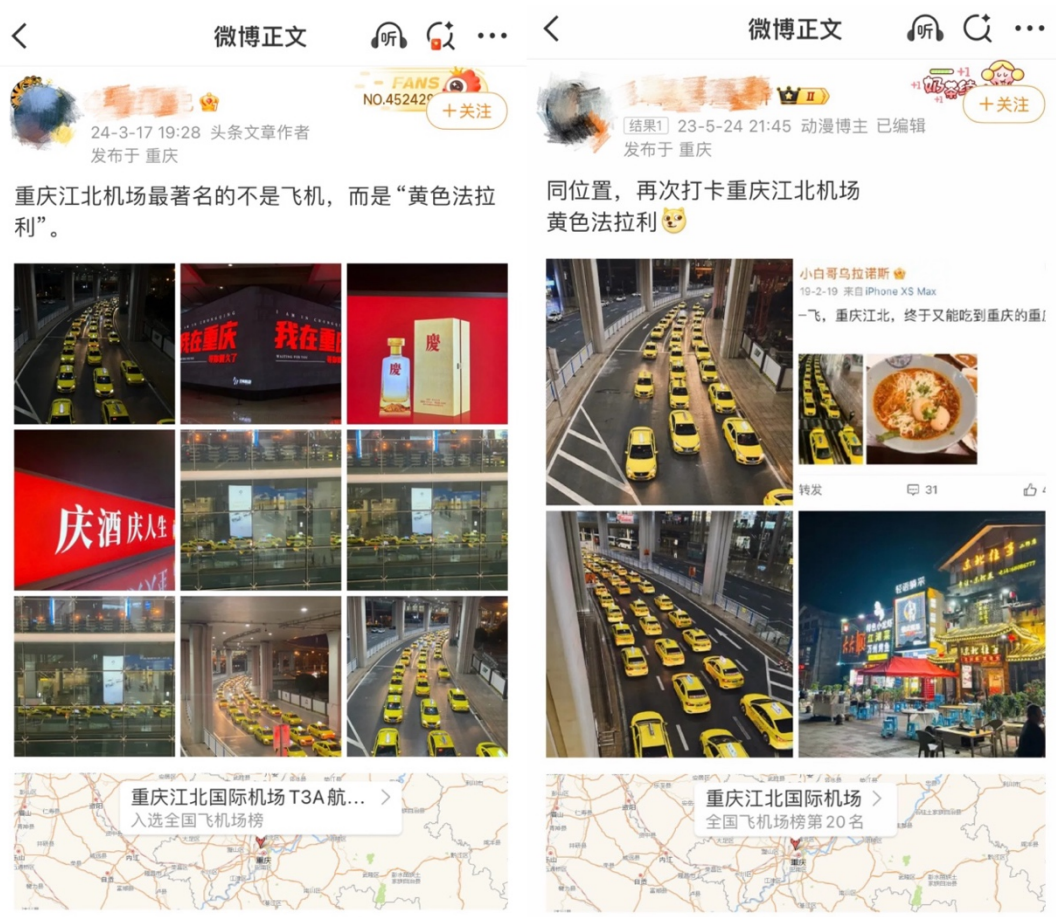


Figure 7. 4: Geotagged Weibo posts of the “Yellow Ferrari”

To promote this emerging city symbol and provide a better experience for tourists who come specifically to take photos, CKG has developed the viewing area, as shown in the Figure 7.5. There is a big sign designed in the shape of an arch, guiding visitors visually to the optimal angle and position for photographing the taxis. The arch is inscribed with the words “Arrive in Chongqing,” marking the moment and location as the symbolic beginning of a traveller’s journey in the city. Additional design elements reflecting

Chongqing's local culture are also included, such as regional dialect phrases, “I Love Chongqing” signage, and simple illustrations of well-known landmarks such as Jiefangbei³⁹ and the Grand Theatre⁴⁰. These features help strengthen the sense of place and deepen visitors' emotional connection to Chongqing.



Figure 7. 5: The photo spot for the “Yellow Ferrari”, “Arriving in Chongqing.”

In addition to presenting the “Yellow Ferrari” queue as a symbol of the city, CKG's vantage point archway also integrates Chongqing into the broader visual and cultural context of China. Traditional Chinese motifs such as red tones and auspicious cloud patterns have been incorporated into the design, creating a visually striking contrast with the bright yellow taxis beneath the overpass. This combination resonates with domestic tourists through shared cultural symbols and offers international visitors a meaningful introduction to Chinese aesthetics.

³⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiefangbei_CBD

⁴⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chongqing_Grand_Theatre

Together, the signage, space design, and iconic taxi fleet form an immersive cultural experience. This thoughtful arrangement helps visitors feel welcomed and appreciated, reducing psychological distance and expressing the warmth and hospitality of both the airport and the city of Chongqing.

7.3 Conviviality: Regulated friendliness and smoothed compliance

Another emotional factor frequently observed at CKG is conviviality. According to Chapter 6 of Wee and Goh's (2019) discussion, conviviality represents a general state of a space as a "friendly third place". This state is built upon the aggregation of diverse semiotic resources and a series of affective regimes that together shape the affective environment.

The notion of a "friendly third place" refers to Oldenburg's (1989) concept of "third place". Oldenburg distinguishes three types of social spaces: the "first place" is the home, the "second place" is the workplace, and the "third place" refers to informal public spaces where people can gather, socialise, and build community connections outside in a neutral and accessible setting. Although "third place" partly overlaps with the idea of a "public place" as commonly discussed in LL studies, the "third place" is characterised by openness, inclusivity, and equal access. Examples of third places include locations such as parks, libraries, and community centres. Wee and Goh (2019) further Oldenburg's (1989) concept by emphasizing that a third place is a space where strangers co-live and co-experience with a sense of togetherness and camaraderie. These spaces must be managed carefully to reduce the potential for misunderstandings and conflict in socially diverse settings. They should encourage individuals to respect others and follow social expectations, such as maintaining silence in a library.

The neutrality, accessibility, and friendliness of third places are regulated through both explicit rules and subtle cues such as social norms and cultural recognition. Signage in particular plays a key role in shaping these regulated emotional dynamics. Signs are

pre-emptive in nature in that they communicate encouraged or accepted behaviours and values, while also signalling what is discouraged or rejected. In doing so, signs help construct the emotional tone of a space. The Bourdieusian notion of habitus, which “explains what happens to people when they enter different social spaces and how that makes them feel and practice” (Threadgold, 2020, p. 51) helps to further situate the regulation of expected responses in a third place within contextualised social norms and values. In this light, the semiotics of conviviality in a third place “offers more than just a descriptive category that captures the modes of peaceful and happy togetherness” (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014, p. 350). Rather, it reflects a complex and dynamic system of interactions and affective regimes that work together to support the conviviality of a shared space under certain rules: “The point is that even in these varied manifestations of conviviality, each has an appropriate code of behaviour that is structured and prescribed” (Wee & Goh, 2019, p.110).

The following affective elements are identified in CKG as contributing to the conviviality of the space as a third place: respect and courtesy, conflict avoidance, and a concern for order and safety. This section will draw on the social and cultural context of Chongqing in its exploration of how CKG functions as a friendly third place and how it actively mobilises semiotic resources to foster conviviality.

7.3.1 The affective regime of a post-pandemic community

In constructing and maintaining CKG as a friendly third place, all passengers are encouraged to respect the experiences of others. One key aspect of this shared responsibility is the maintenance of public health and safety, which is collectively supported by signage, facilities, and people, including passengers and staffs.

Public health management at the CKG includes both day-to-day and special practices. The special practices here refer to the post-pandemic context. Although mandatory COVID-19 measures have been lifted, the airport continues to promote preventive

behaviours in early 2023 such as mask-wearing and physical distancing. This is achieved through various strategies, including prominently displayed signs at the entrances, nearby mask vending machines, and reminders from on-site staff. For example, Figure 7.6 located at the departure level entrance of Terminal 3 features a bright yellow background and high-contrast black text, drawing immediate attention.



Figure 7. 6: A public health sign at an entrance gate

The instruction to wear a mask is highlighted at the top centre in larger font, while the message to maintain distance is visually reinforced with a clear icon. The inclusion of English translations beneath the Chinese text signals that these guidelines apply universally to all passengers. A mask vending machine is positioned near the entrance, offering passengers who are not already wearing masks a chance to meet health expectations and enter the public space in accordance with the recommendation of the sign (see Figure 7.7). The airport staff stationed at the security checkpoint might also play a role in monitoring and encouraging mask-wearing behaviour, further supporting the implementation of health-related norms in this shared environment.

Wee and Goh (2019) use the concept of “stitching” to describe how different actors such as organisations, schools, and individuals can contribute to a cohesive affective regime in their discussions of the Singapore’s efforts to build a dementia-friendly community. Similarly, at CKG, signs, vending machines, staff, and passenger cooperation come together to form an integrated system of support. These combined elements help create a space of conviviality that reflects shared responsibility for public health, both in practice and in emotional tone.



Figure 7. 7: A mask vending machine outside an entrance gate

In 2023, the post-COVID era, wearing masks and maintaining physical distance were encouraged to support public health and disease control. These practices reflect a shared memory and collective emotional response to a public health crisis. A collective identity emerged around the idea of “fighting the epidemic together,” accompanied by a set of moral expectations regarding appropriate behaviour in public settings. Although the mandatory prevention measures and official signage have largely been removed,

reminders encouraging mask use and social distancing continue to function as symbolic markers of this shared experience. These signs do more than convey health advice, they serve as reminders of past collective efforts and act as subtle signals of moral alignment. In this context, such reminders help to identify and commend those who continue to uphold the shared values formed during the pandemic.

Consequently, individuals who attempt to enter crowded public spaces like airports without wearing masks may be perceived as irresponsible. Their actions risk disrupting the informal but powerful moral order established over recent years. These individuals may encounter behavioural resistance or subtle moral judgment, as they are seen to undermine the collective identity and social norms built around mutual care and responsibility during the pandemic and disrespect the togetherness of this certain context.

7.3.2 The affective regime of a family-friendly airport

The CKG's sense of conviviality during regular, non-crisis periods is particularly evident in the child-friendly waiting area. As shown in Figure 7.8, this space is located in the departure zone of Terminal 3 International. It is partially enclosed by sofas, which serve as a physical boundary to define the area.



Figure 7. 8: A children playground in the waiting area of Terminal 3

Although the space and its facilities are primarily intended for children, their effective use depends on the cooperation of multiple parties including children, their guardians, staffs, and other nearby passengers. The smooth functioning of this area relies not only on physical design but also on shared behavioural norms and emotional coordination. In this way, the area also exemplifies what Wee and Goh (2019) describe as “stitching” through the process by which different actors and resources come together, both behaviourally and emotionally, to maintain a supportive and respectful third place.

From the perspective of emplacement, the child-friendly area is situated within a spacious waiting zone, allowing it to maintain a sense of openness while also being distinctly separated from surrounding facilities. The area has its own defined space, marked by a clear physical boundary created through the arrangement of low sofas. Although these sofas do not constitute a compulsory barrier in the physical sense because adults can easily step over them, they function as a soft reminder, subtly reinforcing behavioural norms. This low boundary creates an implicit moral expectation: adults are discouraged from crossing into the space unnecessarily, not because they are physically restricted, but out of a shared sense of care, protection, and respect for children. In this way, the spatial design relies on internalised social values rather than strict enforcement. The placement of seats and televisions around the play area allows adults and other passengers to rest and make use of public amenities without disrupting the children's space. This thoughtful layout supports both child-centred activities and adult needs, contributing to a peaceful, inclusive, and shared environment within the airport.

The children’s area is supported by clearly displayed textual signage that communicates specific behavioural guidelines. As shown in Figure 7.9, signs are placed at various locations within the children’s entertainment area. A large sign is mounted on the wall adjacent to the space, while smaller signs are posted at intervals along the boundary

created by the sofas. These signs serve not only to ensure the safety and hygiene of children and their families but also to protect the rights of other passengers sharing the waiting area.



Figure 7. 9: Signs around the children's playground

The signs include detailed rules aimed at minimizing safety risks. For example, children must be taller than 1.1 meters to use the facilities, they are prohibited from carrying sharp objects, and they are not allowed to use the slide headfirst. These regulations establish clear behavioural expectations to reduce the likelihood of accidents. In terms of hygiene, visitors are required to remove their shoes before entering and are not permitted to bring food or beverages into the area. These rules prioritise cleanliness for users of the children's space while also ensuring that nearby passengers enjoy a clean and pleasant environment.

Visually, the signage uses colourful backgrounds and playful cartoon imagery such as illustrations of children, balloons, and lollipops, which reinforce the child-centred

identity of the space. These design choices not only make the area more appealing and accessible to children but also visually signal to all users that this space is intentionally welcoming and appropriate for young passengers. In doing so, the signs contribute to both functional regulation and emotional inclusivity.

Lastly, the actual use of this child-friendly area in CKG reflects a clean and orderly third space that has been co-constructed by multiple parties, aligning with the definition of an “X-friendly space”, which “signals the specific type of values or interests that the place happens to be supportive of” (Wee & Goh, 2019, p.115). Besides, based on my on-site observations, children and their guardians have generally used the space responsibly, adhering to the rules set for their safety and comfort. Passengers outside the designated area have shown respect and understanding by not intruding or disrupting the space. Meanwhile, airport staff have played a vital role in maintaining order and cleanliness, ensuring the space remains functional and welcoming. Together, these efforts demonstrate how appropriate rules and coordinated management can effectively balance the needs of different passenger groups. In short, this play area gives children space to have fun while allowing other passengers to rest nearby with minimal disruption, supporting a shared environment that respects everyone’s needs.

Importantly, this space also represents a form of spatial and social inclusion, redistributing resources to recognise and protect the rights of children in a setting typically dominated by adult needs. It reflects a broader commitment to child-friendly values by encouraging non-parenting passengers to support the inclusion of families. This helps to ease common challenges faced by traveling parents—such as managing children in confined or overstimulating environments—and contributes to a more equitable and considerate public space. Overall, this child-friendly area illustrates CKG’s thoughtful approach to passenger experience. It demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusivity, shared responsibility, and mutual care, all of which are central to fostering a convivial and genuinely “friendly third place.”

7.3.3 The affective regime of a governed and civilised place

To maintain a friendly and safe third place, it is essential to restrict certain behaviours and prevent potential conflicts with explicit rules and penalties where necessary (Garnett, 2009; Nemeth, 2012). Figure 7.10 shows regulations posted on columns in the T3 parking lot area. The design uses a high-contrast colour scheme of red, white, and black to attract attention and improve visibility. At the centre of the sign is an enlarged no-smoking symbol, which communicates the main message directly through its visual representation. While similar signs are common in many public spaces, the one at CKG includes specific legal references and clearly states the penalties for violating the smoking ban. The fear of fines or even detention serves as a powerful deterrent, making the regulation a strict and non-negotiable rule that establishes clear authority (Crowe & Fennelly, 2013).



Figure 7. 10: A no-smoking sign in the parking area

The sign shown in Figure 7.10 illustrates the notion of stitching in that establishing legal authority and exercising law enforcement power in third places requires cooperation among multiple agencies, including the airport, legislative bodies, and law enforcement departments. Another example of such a sign (see Figure 7.11) is located

on the departure level of Terminal 2, where a large three-dimensional display prohibits unlicensed taxis from picking up passengers. Unlike the previous sign, which targets potential offenders, this one is aimed at protecting potential victims of illegal activity.

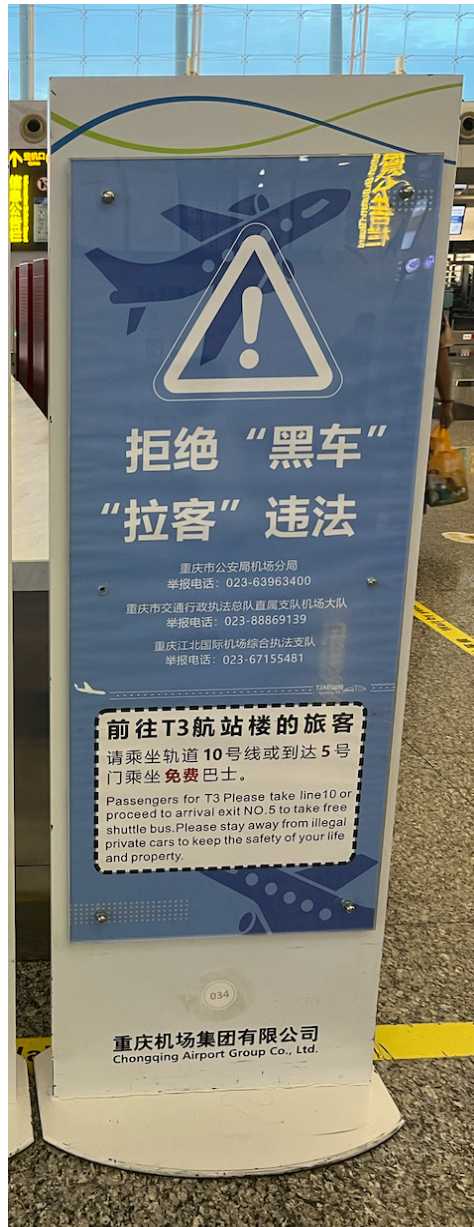


Figure 7. 11: A notice in Terminal 2, “Refuse illegal cabs. Passenger-soliciting is against the law.”

As a result, the purpose of the sign is not to threaten punishment but to provide a clear warning. The phone numbers of several law enforcement agencies are included, emphasizing that this regulation is backed by coordinated efforts between various authorities, rather than being an arbitrary rule set by CKG alone. CKG also offers

passengers alternative shuttle options, such as metro and bus; options which involve support and cooperation from other transportation departments. Rather than deterrence, this sign carries the affective elements of caution. These signs are a microcosm of power structure and empowerment in a public place, contributing to the effective governance of CKG and the condition of conviviality in a third place.

The examples of encouraged and discouraged behaviours given here show no evidence of direct or forced human surveillance. Although various organisations and authorities support these regulations, no evidence shows they enforce them through real-time or constant on-site monitoring. Modern airports are, of course, equipped with extensive surveillance systems, including numerous cameras.

However, in the case of these relatively minor behaviours discussed here, individuals may remain uncertain about whether or when they are actually being monitored. Regulation is largely carried out through the use of directional signs and spatial arrangement of resources. This aligns with the concept of individual surveillance as a tool of public governance, as discussed by Wee and Goh (2019) through Foucault's (1979) theory of the panopticon. According to this theory, when individuals are uncertain whether they are being watched, they are more likely to follow expected norms set by central authorities. This psychological effect becomes a powerful strategy for promoting social harmony. Through thoughtful spatial design and the use of visual symbols, individual self-regulation can be encouraged effectively, contributing to a more convivial and orderly public space.

In the process of creating rules and maintaining order towards conviviality, social media platforms like Weibo offer the official CKG account an efficient way to publish information and reach a wider audience. For example, as shown in Figure 7.12, after the Civil Aviation Administration of China released a new regulation banning power banks without 3C certification from carry-on luggage, the official CKG Weibo account published an announcement two days before the rule came into effect.

The text is brief and easy to understand, beginning with “Urgent Notice” and an exclamation mark to immediately draw attention. This is followed by key details of when the rule starts and what it involves. The post also includes a visual that explains the new regulation in more detail, along with a screenshot of the official document from the Civil Aviation Administration. The blue verification badge in the lower right corner of the account’s profile picture indicates that it is an officially certified Weibo account, confirming the authenticity and credibility of the information it shares.



Figure 7. 12: A notice from the CKG official Weibo account, “Urgent notice: No unmarked power banks allowed.”⁴¹

Online platforms like Weibo help overcome the limitations of traditional paper notices in terms of time and space when sharing updated information. By promoting new

⁴¹ From Weibo public post:@重庆机场官方微博. June 26, 2025. <https://weibo.com/2328400567/5181847390654926>

regulations in advance, it enables passengers to obtain authoritative and accurate information before entering such public place, reduces the chance of delays at airport security caused by passengers carrying non-compliant power banks. The support of digital media has improved the efficiency of operations in public transportation settings and contributes to the creation of a more organised and cooperative public environment. From a broader perspective, the use of social media in this context demonstrates how digital infrastructure can expand the governance capabilities of public institutions. The information shared online is a form of shaping passenger behaviour through early awareness, rather than relying solely on law enforcement within the airport. In this sense, Weibo as an intermediary of affects and information, can be a means of cultivating a sense of preparation and cooperation among travellers.

In summary, both the visible display of rules and authority through signs and acts of individual self-regulation in public spaces reflect the effective utilisation of specific affective regimes, such as deterrence and caution in public governance. The participation of the official Weibo account in the promotion of this set of social behaviours also shows us that social platforms play an effective role in public management. Together, these elements contribute to making CKG a shared public space where strangers can coexist and interact with mutual respect in a generally convivial atmosphere.

7.4 Romance: Journey transcending time and space

After collecting and analysing geotagged social media posts through keyword extraction and thematic analysis of Weibo posts, it was found that the semiotic resources present in Chongqing's public transport hubs have the capacity to evoke romantic experiences. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "romance" originally referred to a literary genre, more specifically, medieval narratives centred on adventure and personal growth. Over time, the term has evolved to include idealised emotional states and affective experiences. Building on this, Wee and Goh (2019)

discuss the affective regime of romance by examining Bildungsroman novels and films, which often inspire personal growth and emotional resonance in audiences. They link these affective experiences to Ahmed's (2014) concept of the "affective economy", arguing that the emotions associated with romantic narratives are closely tied to consumerism and the commodification of place. For instance, the global popularity of The Lord of the Rings films significantly boosted tourism in New Zealand, as fans have sought to experience the landscapes associated with the protagonists' adventure and growth, demonstrating how romance affect, and profit are grounded in audiences' emotional investments.

As described by Sandvoss' (2005) fandom theory, star-chasing behaviour is an extension of the fan self, and fans experience celebrity relationships as profound personal and emotional satisfaction. In China, star-chasing culture has experienced rapid growth in recent years (Yang, 2009). Within fan communities, fans organise a wide range of activities aimed at increasing the visibility and popularity of their idols. For instance, booking billboard advertisements for idols' birthdays, hosting public celebration events, and producing and selling fan-made merchandise, giving rise to a massive and complex industry. The rise of social media platforms has further intensified these practices, enabling fans to engage in digital forms of promotion such as creating trending hashtags and manipulating online popularity rankings (Zhang & Negus, 2020). By 2020, the commercial value of star-chasing activities in China was estimated to exceed 100 billion yuan (Wang & Luo, 2023). Given this context, this section applies Wee and Goh's (2019) framework to analyse geotagged fan-generated posts on Weibo, showing how public infrastructure and online platforms can evoke romantic affect and also participate in affective economies through semiotic design and fan narrative association in an international airport.

The desire to establish emotional bonds with idols has transformed certain real-world public spaces, such as airports, into sites of romantic and sentimental experience. Such

forms of “experience economy” creates business opportunities and contribute to the commercialisation of public spaces (Wee & Goh, 2019). For instance, renting large-screen advertising space at CKG can generate direct economic benefits for these locations by turning emotional engagement into market value.

7.4.1 The experience of romance through community activities

Figure 7.13 is a Weibo post tagged at the Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport in which a singer, Zhenyuan Zhang’s fan club took pictures of the electronic screen at the baggage area to promote his upcoming concert.



Figure 7. 13: A fan support post for Zhenyuan Zhang⁴²

⁴² A Chinese singer and performer: <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%BC%B5%E7%9C%9F%E6%BA%90>

In terms of text content, the post makes use of the pronoun “we” to indicate that the post speaks from the collective perspective of the fan community, expressing shared emotions rather than those of an individual. On Weibo, fan club accounts are typically managed by several fan representatives, so their posts represent the voice of the broader fan base. The words “艰辛” (hardship) and “长途跋涉” (long journey) highlight the challenges some fans faced in traveling to Chongqing for the concert and the airport support event. At the same time, words like “美好的” (beautiful) and “独家记忆” (exclusive memory) convey the emotional rewards fans gain from participating in these activities. By “与你相见” (meeting you), they can momentarily “暂停思念” (pause their longing), creating cherished personal memories. This language reflects a subjective sense of fulfillment and willingness to engage in such efforts. In terms of form, the use of parallel idioms in the second paragraph such as “熙熙攘攘” (bustling), “来来往往” (coming and going), and “时时刻刻” (every moment), adds rhythm and poetic expression (Packard, 2000). These idioms, combined with the parallel sentence structure, enhance the literary quality of the text and intensify its emotional tone. Language like this helps convey fans’ sincere feelings toward their idols. Finally, the third paragraph provides details about a fan-organised support advertisement displayed at the airport, illustrating that this was a well-planned and coordinated group effort.

Several strategies work together to present this post as a shared emotional expression from the fan community. First, visual design emphasises group identity through consistent use of the singer’s official support colour, green. This colour appears in elements such as the account’s profile picture, the heart emoji in the text, and the fan-made advertisement displayed at the airport. These visual cues help clearly signal a collective affiliation with the singer. Second, the post includes a tag of the singer’s account and uses relevant hashtags. This follows common practices on Weibo for increasing visibility and aligning with the platform’s communication style. These elements also help the post reach a wider audience within the fan base (Zappavigna, 2015). Third, the post is shared within the singer’s “超话” (super topic), a dedicated

space on Weibo where fans gather to share content related to a specific celebrity. This can be seen as a strategy of spatial positioning in the online environment, ensuring that the message is directed toward users with similar interests and fan identities. Finally, the comment section shows active participation from individual fans, many of whom post supportive remarks, along with the same hashtags. This interaction further confirms the post's role as a collective emotional display, supported and echoed by the broader fan community.

From physical signage to online fan activity, and from collective to individual support, this post reflects the strong cohesion and emotional appeal that characterises fan activities. As Yan and Yang (2021) suggest, such fan behaviour helps to build a relationship in which fans cultivate an idol through a shared family bond. Through these practices, fans not only strengthen their emotional connection with their idol but also deepen their ties with each other. The shared goal of supporting the idol reinforces a sense of community and affirms a common identity within the fan group.

7.4.2 The experience of romance from an individual perspective

A similar pattern of experiencing romance in CKG can be observed in individual fan behaviours, particularly in the practice of “checking in” and “airport pick up”. In Chinese fan culture, the act of “checking in” refers to taking photos specifically for posting on social media to document a visit to a location associated with a celebrity. Similarly, “airport pickup” refers to fans going to the airport to welcome their idol upon arrival. Both are common and highly ritualised behaviours in Chinese fandom communities. For example, Figure 7.14 shows a “checking in” Weibo post by a fan who photographed two advertisements featuring her idol Wang Yibo at CKG, where he appeared as brand spokesperson.

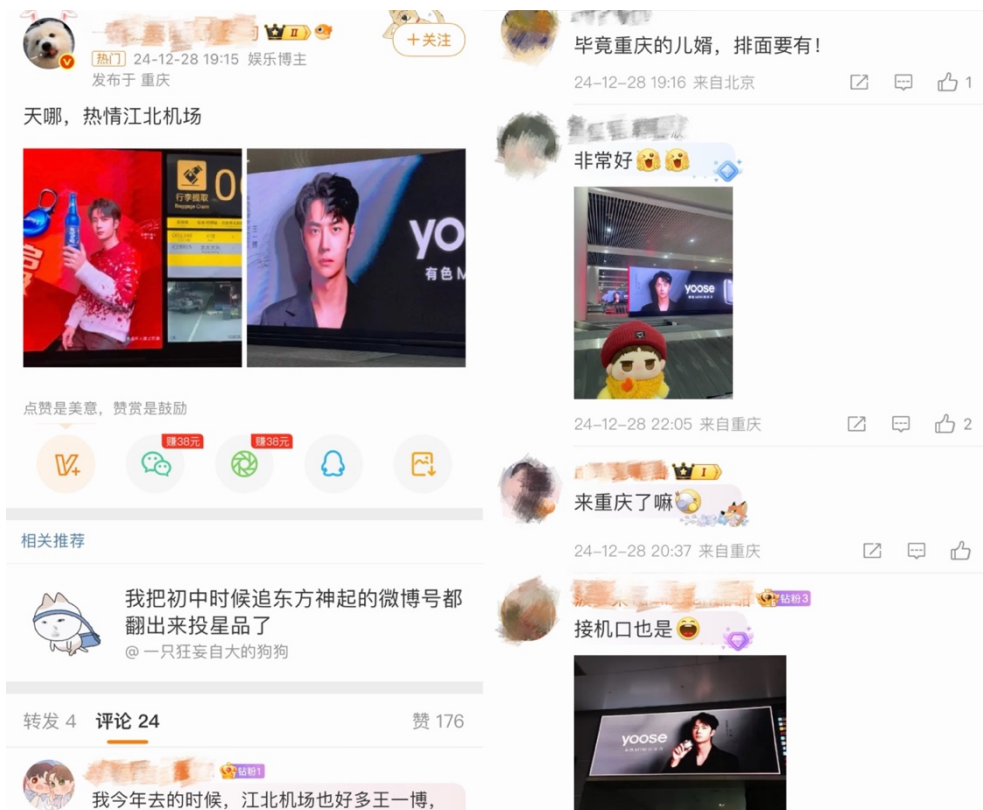


Figure 7. 14: A fan support post for Yibo Wang⁴³

The fan captured a moment where the idol’s full face appeared clearly on the electronic screen. Her caption reveals a progression of emotional responses: first, surprise and excitement, expressed through the exclamation “天哪”(Oh my god), upon unexpectedly encountering the advertisement; then, a sense of happiness and appreciation toward CKG for displaying the ad, which she described as “热情” (enthusiastic). In the comments, other individual fans shared their own photos of similar advertisements from other locations within the airport, using smiley face emojis to express their satisfaction and excitement at having completed and shared their own check-in experiences.

These forms of interaction illustrate how fans connect with each other in an online platform through shared ritual behaviours tied to physical locations. The check-in serves not only as a way of documenting fandom but also as a form of identity

⁴³A Chinese actor, singer, dancer, and professional motorcycle racer: <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%8E%8B%E4%B8%80%E5%8D%9A>

verification within the fan community. It provides emotional fulfillment, a sense of belonging, and social validation. As such, these practices contribute to the romantic and affective dimensions of star-chasing, offering fans both personal pleasure and a feeling of accomplishment through participation in shared fan activities.

In the Figure 7.15, a fan records a video of an airport pickup event for the Korean idol Wendy at CKG. The video shows a large number of fans gathered at the airport, each holding up their mobile phones to capture the idol's arrival. To secure a favourable position requires fans arrive hours in advance, waiting in a crowded and somewhat chaotic environment in order to follow and get as close as possible to the celebrity.



Figure 7. 15: A fan support post for Wendy (Shon Seung-wan)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ A Korean singer: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wendy_\(singer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wendy_(singer))

In the video, Wendy's simple gesture of waving at her fans triggered waves of screaming and cheering, capturing the emotional intensity of the moment. The visible excitement and the intense atmosphere reflect fans' high emotional investment. The use of a crying emoji in this Weibo post demonstrates the deep affective impact of direct interaction with an idol. Although airport pickup is not officially organised by the airport itself, the airport infrastructure, with its large and open public space function serves as an unintentional stage for these highly emotional and ritualised fan activities.

These gatherings serve more than just logistical purposes; they act as emotionally charged ceremonies that foster a stronger sense of intimacy between fans and idols. For fans, such moments fulfill romanticised desires to express affection publicly and experience physical proximity, reinforcing their emotional connection and identity as devoted supporters. In this way, CKG becomes a meaningful site for fan-idol interaction, blending mobility, media, and affect into a collective romantic fan practice.

In summary, whether through individual fan activities or organised group events such as airport gatherings, the core of these behaviours remains consistent: they are expressions of fans' emotional attachment to their idols through concrete actions. These emotionally charged practices transcend the limitations of time and space in the digital environment, enabling fans who share similar identities to connect and resonate with one another. As a result, they construct a flexible, emotionally driven virtual community where identity recognition and shared affect take centre stage.

Although locations such as transport hubs are not originally intended for emotional expression, fan activities have expanded their potential functions. This transformation is made possible because these spaces, as semiotic resources, are capable of carrying and reflecting the meanings embedded in contemporary popular culture. These findings extend the scope of Wee and Goh's (2019) discussion, which primarily focused on

tourist attractions, to more everyday public spaces, enriching the practical application of theoretical frameworks within the context of cyberspace.

7.5 Nostalgia: Irretrievable past time and place

Among this study's research sites, there was found an abundance of signage and artefacts containing nostalgic narratives. The word *nostalgia* originates from the Greek word *nostos*, meaning "return home." In modern contexts, it is typically associated with a longing for a romanticised past, a place or time idealised in memory (Gupta & Medappa, 2020). Boym (2001) suggests that nostalgic narratives represent a form of rebellion against modernity and progress. In the context of this research, *nostalgia* refers specifically to the sentimentality for, and yearning toward, old Chongqing places and past Chongqing lives.

As a hub for long-distance travel, Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport is a place from which locals depart from or return to the city. It serves as both a physical and emotional boundary marking the transition between staying in or leaving one's hometown. This condition makes the transport hub especially resonant with feelings of nostalgia. In this section, analysis will focus on how semiotic resources elicit regimes of nostalgia within the airport.

A small art exhibition entitled "*Nostalgia for Chongqing: The Eternal Native Memories*", was discovered during the second data collection phase in late 2023. The exhibition was located in the passageway between Terminal 2 (T2) and Terminal 3 (T3) at Chongqing Jiangbei Airport. Currently, T2 handles most domestic flights from Chongqing to other cities, while T3 manages all international flights along with some domestic routes. Both terminals experience high passenger volumes. When passengers transfer between terminals, there is a walk of approximately ten-minutes through a covered passageway. Since this passageway is adjacent to a commercial zone in T3 featuring shops, convenience stores, and restaurants, it attracts significant foot traffic.

The exhibition primarily consisted of large wall posters and three-dimensional photo displays which extended along the entire corridor. Signs introducing the exhibition were positioned at both entrances, ensuring visibility for passengers moving between the two terminals and entering the passageway from different sides.

The introductory sign (Figure 7.16) lays the foundation for a nostalgic atmosphere by establishing a tone of historicity and localisation. The centre introduces the theme of the exhibition and is surrounded by a blank white border, resembling a frame that makes it both visually and conceptually prominent. First of all, the word choices “故土” (*native land*) and “乡愁” (*homesickness*) directly convey nostalgia at the semantic level. These two words frequently appear in films, songs, and poems. Repeated use in literary works has endowed these terms with strong aesthetic and emotional connotations, enhancing their potential impact when conveying the exhibition’s theme to viewers.



Figure 7. 16: A sign introducing the art exhibition

In terms of visual semiotics, the four Chinese characters “重庆乡愁” (Chongqing homesickness) are written in traditional Chinese brush style, implying a connection to

cultural tradition and historical depth. The simple yet vivid illustration surrounding the characters depicts the stilt house, a traditional style of architecture characteristic of old Chongqing. Known as the “mountainous city,” Chongqing developed this distinctive architecture to overcome the challenges of hillside living. The landmark Hongyadong is a well-known cluster of stilt houses that offers tourists an immersive experience of Chongqing’s unique topography and architectural aesthetics. Stilt houses were once the homes of older generations and are now symbolic Chongqing’s cultural past. The design of the illustration ingeniously highlights both the city’s architectural heritage and the lived experiences of its past residents.

Around the centre of the introductory sign is a series of photos corresponding to the theme in depicting daily life in Chongqing. Rich historical and cultural symbols further index localisation and enhance a sense of nostalgia through evoking memories and emotions connected to the past. Photos portray historical scenes of Chongqing’s daily life, including traditional food, old architecture, and everyday activities. As Scollon and Scollon (2003) suggest, participants in an image are not only intended for narration but also to establish a connection with the audience. The individuals represented in these photos are local residents engaged in routine activities, such as walking along the flagstone street, chatting with neighbours, shopping in traditional stores, or engaged in other ordinary moments conveying a profound sense of community life. It appears that most people in the photos rarely look directly into the camera or even notice it. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) describe this behaviour of not making eye contact with viewers as an “offer,” which allows the viewers to observe more freely and closely. Photos of this type convey to the audience that images captured unintentionally, authentically reflecting past life in Chongqing, and inviting them to immersive experience the old Chongqing atmosphere.

Intriguingly, there is an English translation beneath the Chinese characters on the sign, printed in a smaller font, forming a blend of localisation and globalisation. This

translation suggests that the organiser is mindful of foreign visitors, and that these visitors are also welcome to understand the exhibition and appreciate Chongqing's historical heritage. The intriguing contrast between traditional Chinese writing and modern English printing symbolises Chongqing as a city deeply rooted in its local culture traditions yet simultaneously open to the global community.

The exhibition items in the corridor further evoke nostalgia by reinforcing a shared local identity and bridging the connection between old and new Chongqing lifestyles. Large posters cover the wall side of the corridor, uniformly designed with a striking red background that immediately attracts attention. Aligning with the exhibition's theme, these posters depict various aspects of past life in Chongqing, including the local dialect, historic landmarks, and old maps. Unlike the main thematic poster, these posters utilise an animated design style, creating a distinctive visual experience. On the opposite side of the corridor, cube-shaped installations with six surfaces each display photos of contemporary Chongqing landmarks, effectively contrasting past and present.

The wall posters reinforce a nostalgic atmosphere through painting with strong indexical elements evoking fond memories of past life pieces. The utilisation of a cute painting style aligns with Wee and Goh's (2019) analysis of the notion *kawaii*, which is expected to evoke a sense of tenderness and cuteness based on shared appreciation of aesthetic, "hoping to not only foster an understanding of the propositional content of their various messages but also a desired affective response" (p. 48). With soft lines and rich bright colours, these paintings try to reproduce the past time in a childish and cute style to arouse the feeling of nostalgia in a tender and thus acceptable way.

As a part of the exhibition, Figure 7.17 is a poster depicting the Chaotianmen Wharf, featuring local residents at the formerly popular mode of transport. A small vendor carrying goods with poles is seen walking along a stone staircase. Pedestrians sit by the river, chatting casually, talking on the phone, staring blankly into space, or dozing off.

Nearby, passengers carry their belongings and suitcases, preparing to board, while a young couple kisses goodbye on the bridge.



Figure 7. 17: A wall poster in a corridor

These ordinary scenes romanticising the past have all been replaced by contemporary lifestyles: small vendors have given way to modern shops, stone staircases have been renovated into flat roads, and ferries have been largely replaced by metro systems and taxis. In the background stands the tramcar, a mode of transport once used to carry passengers, helping them avoid long staircases. This tramcar once symbolised the prosperity of Chaotianmen Wharf but has vanished along with the memories of that era. Although seemingly mundane, these scenes convey in imagery three keywords associated with old Chongqing indicated by the accompanying text: mountains, rivers, and wharves.

Chaotianmen Wharf played a crucial role in Chongqing's historical development, functioning as the main trading hub and transport centre for travellers. However, over time, water transport has gradually receded from trade and travel, being replaced by modern means such as air travel and road transport. Consequently, the scenes portrayed

here represent a period and place to which one can never return, a representation of classic Chongqing life, symbolizing a sense of a “lost homeland” (Yao, 2025).

On the other side of the corridor, art installations protected by glass covers are placed at intervals along the pathway. These pieces reinforce local collective identity by creating a temporal connection between Chongqing’s past and present. They also echo the exhibition’s theme of nostalgia through a visual style that contrasts distinctly with the wall posters. As illustrated in Figure 7.18, these cube-shaped works displays authentic photos of contemporary Chongqing landmarks and well-known tourist attractions on six surfaces, such as Liziba Station⁴⁵.



Figure 7. 18: An art exhibit in the corridor joining T2 and T3

These images highlight the city's ongoing modernisation and urban transformation through impressive architecture, rapid urban development, and advanced technology. Together they represent present-day Chongqing life and complete a past-present timeline in combination with the scenes on the wall posters. For local residents, the two sides of the corridor create a meaningful dialogue between memory and reality,

⁴⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liziba_station

reinforce their emotional ties through shared experiences, and enhance their sense of community and belonging. On another level, presenting modern Chongqing through real photographs subtly suggests that the life in photos is tangible. In contrast, even though the portrayal of past Chongqing in painting conveys idealisation and romanticisation, it also evokes the irretrievable nature of the past.

Overall, this exhibition succeeds in constructing a regime of nostalgia by localizing the past life of Chongqing and reinforcing a collective local identity. Its physical location, the rich historical elements featured on wall posters, and the shared memories and experiences conveyed through posters and cubes all contribute to evoking the intended emotional response.

However, diverse affective regimes can coexist in the same space, and different viewers may engage in different affective practices when encountering the same affective materials. Therefore, I argue that for non-local and foreign visitors who lack firsthand experience or understanding of old Chongqing, this exhibition evokes more of an affective experience of hospitality. More precisely, to these visitors, the exhibition presents a previously unfamiliar city that actively introduces and promotes its history and culture, creating a sense of warmth and welcome from the moment they arrive. In the next section, the regime of hospitality is interpreted primarily from the perspective and experiences of visitors.

7.6 Affective regimes and Bourdieusian notion of capital

In Chapter 2, the core concepts of Bourdieusian sociology are introduced and justification given for how this framework can deepen an analysis of affective regimes. Building on this earlier discussion, this chapter has examined how CKG uses semiotic resources, spatial design, and Bourdieusian notion of habitus to shape patterned, expected collective feelings. In this section, I further argue that these planned affective regimes work through, and in turn reinforce, all forms of capital in CKG. In other words,

as passengers move through the airport and engage with various affective experiences, the airport simultaneously becomes a site where capitals are accumulated and strengthened.

Cultural capital is especially visible in how the airport organises affective regimes that make Chongqing legible as both contemporary and historically grounded. One prominent case is the curated experience of the “Yellow Ferrari” spot outside Terminal 3, currently the most popular site in CKG. By inviting passengers to stop, photograph, and share in an enthusiastic and hospitable manner, it turns a branded visual location into a recognisable “culturalised” city namecard that promotes Chongqing as a desirable destination. It is worth noting that evoking the affective experience of hospitality also addresses economic capital as a strategy to attract tourists. The site provides a ready-made script for participation, encouraging travellers to perform a recognisable form of, in Bourdieusian terms, “tourist competence”. Online promotion of “Yellow Ferrari” extends the experience beyond the terminal, strengthening its capacity for cultural projection, while at the same time translating attention into potential tourism value.

Similarly, the “Old Chongqing” themed photo exhibition consolidates cultural capital by packaging local heritage and city identity into durable, publicly accessible cultural objects and evoking expected feelings. These institutional narratives provide an authorised interpretive frame which guides interpretation by signalling what counts as local culture, which histories are worth noticing, and how the city should be understood from a heritage perspective. Tourists in particular are invited to slow down, look, and align their feelings with institutionally selected images of the city. It is through stabilising an experienced affective regime experience that Chongqing becomes simultaneously memorable and meaningful.

When passengers or tourists encounter similar or familiar emotions or experiences with particular photos or narratives, social capital is and strengthened because “homophily” is produced and starts to play its role (Bottero, 2009). This is based on the nature of

social relationships that people feel more comfortable with “people like us” and desire to establish close connections in public environments. This practice encourages people with shared experiences to feel and gather, and thus “sticky affinities” are generated which convert cultural capital into social capital.

Threadgold (2020) conceptualises symbolic capital as the result of other forms of capital being successfully embodied and recognised. In this account, symbolic capital becomes visible through judgments or evaluations such as “being famous, important, visible, admired, loved, invited” (p. 95), which powerfully signal that other forms of capital have been consolidated and accumulated into wanted outcomes. In the present case, a clear empirical indicator of this conversion are passengers’ social-media posts, where experience and comment on CKG’s value is made public. From the viewpoint of symbolic capital, posts that praise CKG’s services or facilities are not merely personal opinions; they function as recognition work that helps transform material investment and operational efficiency into reputational standing. In Bourdieusian terms, such comments index the successful mobilisation of economic capital, which is then converted into symbolic capital through positive public evaluation and circulation. High levels of participation and enthusiasm around “star-chasing” activities can be read as evidence that economic capital is being successfully approved by fan groups. Therefore, in CKG, economic resources of event management, security, spatial organisation, and branding enable practices that attract crowds, generate excitement, and sustain repeated participation, again converting economic investment into visibility and recognition.

The layered performances and overlaps of affective regimes and other forms of capital indicate that symbolic capital has been effectively embodied and reinforced at CKG. This accumulation is precisely how symbolic capital is defined in practice, a publicly recognisable status as not only a modernised, “humanised”, top ten international airport in China, but also as a showcase for urban modernity, an important window through

which passengers can further encounter and evaluate the city's economic, cultural and social narratives. Overall, involving Bourdieusian notions of capital in interpreting affective regimes provides further evidence for treating affective regimes as an effective, pre-planned, and manageable place-making strategies, rather than as incidental or spontaneous responses to space.

7.7 Summary

This chapter demonstrates the exploration of LL from the emotional dimensions of language, semiotic practices, and public discourse. It argues that affective regimes play a crucial role in meaning-making processes and in shaping the way public transport spaces are constructed and experienced. It adopts Wee and Goh's (2019) concept of affective regimes as a theoretical framework, integrating both offline and online LLs to analyse how four specific affects: hospitality, conviviality, romance, and nostalgia, are evoked and regulated within CKG.

Building on existing analyses of single affective regimes in specific locations by Wee and Goh (2019) and Yao (2025), this chapter examines different concurrent affective regimes within the large public space of CKG as an assemblage. These affective regimes are expressed through various signs, technologies, and forms of interaction, reflecting a range of emotional orientations and social expectations embedded in the space. While emotional dynamics are distinct, they sometimes overlap within shared scenarios, contributing to a layered affective environment and emotional experience. Together, these regimes help construct CKG as a humanised space of public order where passengers can co-exist through a balance of regulation, social interaction, and emotional expression.

The rise of social media has reduced the constraints of time and space traditionally associated with physical environments, allowing online semiotic expressions to make affective regimes more dynamic and far-reaching. This expansion broadens the scope

of LL research and highlights the increasing fluidity and multiplicity of emotional expressions in public space. The public sharing and discussion of personal experiences and emotions by individual users on social media platforms offers public spaces such as airports opportunities to receive user-generated feedback, which can inform potential improvements in services and facilities, contributing to more user-centred public infrastructure and atmosphere.

Findings show that affective regimes are not fixed or uniform; rather, multiple affective experiences can coexist, and different audiences may show distinct reactions towards the same affective material. A closer analysis reveals that these emotional experiences are deeply embedded in broader socio-cultural framework and identity. The affects experienced in these public spaces serve as symbolic indexes of not only the audience's own background, but more significantly, contribute to understanding Chongqing's local identity, culture, history, and everyday life.

Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Concluding summary

The aim of this study was to provide both a broad overview and an in-depth interpretation of linguistic landscapes in Chongqing's main public transport hubs. A multilayered theoretical framework and a mixed methodology were applied, generating quantitative results from fourteen transport hubs and qualitative insights from two large-scale hubs. To address its research objectives, this study developed three research questions. In this concluding chapter, the study's research questions will be revisited and findings and results specific to each question discussed.

Research Question 1: “What types of information are conveyed through the linguistic landscape of transport hubs in Chongqing, and what features or changes within transport hubs can be identified?”

The aim of the first research question was to develop an understanding of LLs at select research sites. This question was answered by employing a three-dimensional taxonomy of signage in Chapter 5. Overall, the signage at transport hubs in Chongqing contains information about: a) the types of information in public transportation spaces; b) the usage of language in public transportation spaces; c) the current operational status of urban public transportation.

Through carefully coding photo data by content and function, the signage at public

transport hubs in Chongqing was discovered to convey five main types of information: notices, directional signs, advertising signs, public-welfare signs, and COVID-19 signs. The high proportion of notices and directional signs across sites highlights the core role of these sites as transportation facilities, while the presence of different sign types also implies that transportation spaces are capable of delivering diverse information and operating as multi-functional sites.

The results of coding by languages show that bilingual signs incorporating English are highly visible and frequently used across sites, with English fulfilling both communicative and symbolic functions. In contrast, Korean and Japanese appear only sporadically on information and directional boards in the international airport, serving a primarily communicative purpose. Traditional Chinese characters and Hanyu Pinyin occur on a small subset of Chinese signs, and function mainly as symbolic resources. Taken together, these patterns suggest a language ideology within Chongqing's transportation department and relating government agencies that is positively oriented toward globalisation, and potentially reflect the expanding international tourism sector along with an increased demand for bi/multilingual signage in Chongqing.

Lastly, by comparing numeric results across stations, this study sheds light on current operational status and changes occurring within Chongqing's main transport hubs:

a) Touristification of transport hubs. The Crown Escalator and the two wharfs display a notably higher share of commercial and tourism advertising. Commodified languages indexing local places or products suggest an ongoing shift from purely transport functions toward tourism-oriented spaces (Jaworski, 2010). This interpretation is further supported by on-site observations of relatively large proportions of organised tour groups at these locations.

b) Withdrawal of traditional transport means. The three coach stations considered in this study were found to have kept a higher proportion of COVID-19 signs than other

sites, even during the third data collection period, which took place after the formal end of pandemic restrictions. The persistence of expired signage suggests reduced turnover and, potentially, declining use of coaches or slower updating practices at these facilities.

c) Utilisation of QR codes and promotion of self-service. Quantitative results showed that although QR codes constitute a smaller share of signage across sites and use cases, examples from Section 5.4 and Chapter 6 demonstrate that they have been widely adopted for high-stakes practices (e.g., identity authentication and payment) raises significant practical implications. These codes can offset the temporal and spatial limitations of physical signage and traditional servicing practices by extending the interactional space between users, information, and self-services, thus such trends and shifts are reshaping how people interact with semiotic resources and infrastructures in spatial contexts. The widespread deployment of self-service equipment and the active promotion of online platforms also signals an official commitment to advancing digitalisation and smart technologies in public transportation.

The answer and discussion of RQ1 provides a comprehensive overview of signage across Chongqing's transport hubs, outlining the main sign types, patterns of language use and translation, and current operational condition of different transport means. These findings furnish essential groundwork for exploring the remaining research questions.

Research Question 2: “How does signage in Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station contribute to the construction, organisation, and differentiation of social functions within a multifunctional large-scale railway hub?”

The second research question was investigated by employing Pennycook's concept of assemblage (2017) and Scollon and Scollon's geosemiotics (2003). Chapter 6 examined Chongqing North High-speed Railway Station as a large-scale multi-functional

assemblage. It was argued that the station's functions are constituted through interactions among signs, people, places, and other semiotic resources. These interactions were used as a basis to segment levels and areas of the building into a set of clearly delineated functional zones: a) The ground plaza was recognised as an in-between negotiable zone; b) the ticket-check area as an information-guided fast passage zone; c) the waiting hall as a passenger-friendly relaxation zone; d) the shopping area as a diverse experiential commercial zone; e) the boarding area as an organised crowd diversion zone; and f) the arrival level as a multi-functional interchange zone.

Through adopting a passenger's trajectory as an analytic lens and drawing on observations of signage use and interaction, the chapter described its recognised functional zones in sequence of passenger encounter. For example, in the ticket-checking zone, signage communicates procedures and salient reminders at accordingly noticeable places; staff manage queuing and deliver screening services with devices; and passengers read and comply with posted instructions while coordinating with staff. In concert, signs, facilities, people, and spatial layout produce a setting oriented to being orderly and efficient.

Additionally, Chapter 6 argued that interactions between signage, multimodal resources, and participants are dynamic, with the capacity to enhance, extend, or reconfigure the function of an area (Hua et al., 2017; Kallen, 2010). The ground plaza illustrates this variability: in ordinary periods, the interplay of signs with landscaping and pedestrian routes supports a buffering function that mediates entry to the high-speed rail complex, in addition to serving a leisure function for residents. During the pandemic, the same site was reconstituted as a restricted zone under stringent control through revised signage, barriers, and staff protocols.

The analyses produced in addressing the second research question underscore the need to situate signage within the broader ecology of spatial production rather than treating it as an isolated object of study. Adopting this perspective clarifies how signs

operate as key mediators that translate material settings into functionally differentiated and meaningful places.

Research Question 3: “What affective regimes are mobilised through the linguistic landscape of the Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport, and what forms of capital (e.g. symbolic, cultural, economic) are invoked and negotiated in the semiotic construction of an international transport hub?”

The third research question was answered by applying insights from Wee and Goh’s concept of affective regimes (2019) and to data collected from social media platforms in Chapter 7. This chapter identified four types of affective regimes at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport: hospitality, conviviality, romance, and nostalgia. Within these regimes, signage works affectively through wording, modality, visual design, emplacement, and interactional practices in shaping passengers’ affective experiences.

Findings indicate that conviviality—the establishment of a “friendly third place” in which strangers can coexist on equal footing was the most extensively operationalised affect in CKG. Hospitality, which projects an image of warm, service-forward care was the second most prominent orientation across the airport. Reflected in geotagged social-media posts from passengers, the most frequently shared experiences centered on romance and romanticised moments, primarily relating to star-chasing experiences in CKG. Finally, as a physical gateway to Chongqing echoing the city’s urban development, CKG also layered the affective regime of nostalgia in space to evoke past times and lives.

By referring to Bourdieu’s notions of capital, Chapter 7 found performances and practices of enhancing various capitals (social/cultural/symbolic/economic) through carefully considering the intention and rationale of each affective regime within broader contexts (Threadgold, 2020). For instance, the recognisable taxi (“Yellow Ferrari”) pick-up point on the overpass of the arrival level provides passengers, especially tourists, with an opportunity for an immersive experience with Chongqing

culture, showcasing a well-considered service image, evoking passengers' emotional experiences of hospitality, and promoting the tourism industry. Through making the "Yellow Ferrari" a calling card for promoting Chongqing's culture, the influence of which has long since spread on social media platforms, the signs and infrastructures at the pick-up point simultaneously addressed the cultural capital. This perspective enhanced understanding of the role of signage in a public space through explaining why intentionally managed "common feelings" emerge in specific public contexts and how they are converted into economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capital.

Overall, this study provided a systematic examination of signage in Chongqing's main transport hubs, beginning with a panoramic view and moving to more specified and nuanced analyses. The interpretation of signage was considered in terms of design and emplacement as well as in terms of its interaction with people and spatial configurations in a place. This research demonstrated how the major transport hubs in a contemporary city become both socially and semiotically meaningful public places which carry solid physical functions and significant symbolic affordances for mobility and everyday life.

8.2 Contributions

In exploring its three research questions, this study refers to and integrates prior work, advancing and validating theory and methodology. Results are a first-of-their-kind comprehensive interpretation of the LLs at Chongqing's public transport hubs which offers several contributions to the current research field. The following sections provide thorough discussion of how this study supports, extends, or challenges previous works theoretically or methodologically.

8.2.1 A thorough and synthetic study of urban public transport system

As a comprehensive, in-depth investigation of signage across a contemporary urban public transportation system, this study supplies empirical data and analytic perspectives to LL, urban transportation, and mobility research.

In terms of research sites, this study extends the scope and depth of LL research in urban transportation spaces. Whereas prior studies have typically examined a single type of node, e.g. a train station (Ayyub & Rohmah, 2024) or airport (Li & Yang, 2022; Woo & Nora, 2022), this study integrates multiple station types within the same urban network, yielding a comprehensive view of an entire city transport infrastructure and complementing the work of Putra et al. (2024), which investigated three types of transport stations in Sidoarjo regency, Indonesia. Alongside quantitative analysis of content, language, and form, this study gives a qualitative account of how signage helps constitute spatial functions and elicit affective experiences.

This study fills a gap in existing LL research and contributes to sociolinguistic literature on one of China's major cities. The dataset spans 14 stations across six public transport modes, covering the principal corridors of a contemporary international city. By combining a systematic analysis of urban traffic signage with a thorough examination of the social and cultural meanings it indexes, this study offers a relatively complete portrait of Chongqing's traffic signage and traces changes in the public transportation system over the past two years, thereby capturing the city's current tempo and ongoing adjustments. For example, the post-COVID management measures reflect Chongqing's official solutions and commitments to public-health prevention and risk communication during public crisis.

As public transportation structures residents' everyday mobilities, many cases in this study encode locally specific cultural information, depicting ordinary life in a major city of Southwest China through behavior, habit, language, culture, history, and commerce. This perspective deepens understanding of Chongqing and advances research on the identities of the city and its residents. For example, the Crown

Escalator makes passengers' experience of Chongqing's rugged terrain visible and legible, while the two wharfs serve as material repositories of the city's historical dependence on river transport during its formative period. As captured in the current study, both modes of travel are now shifting from routine transport means to tourist attractions, illustrating the upgrading of local transit and the reconfiguration of residents' mobility practices. Overall, by analyzing the dynamic interactions among signs, people, spatial layouts, and facilities, the study shows how publics assemble, circulate, and communicate within shared spaces in a transport hub, and captures the multiple roles language plays in constituting everyday practices and producing public space.

This study also contributes to urban transportation research by supporting the of conceptualisation of transportation as an urban space with distinct functional and symbolic roles. As discussed in Chapter 2, Hopkins (2020) highlights the catalytic effects of transportation on tourism; Graham and Gibbons (2019) examine the wider economic impacts (WEIs) of transport improvement; and Calthorpe (1993) proposes a representative framework for transit-oriented development (TOD), all of which stem from transportation's basic functions. Building on these foundations, the mixed-methods analysis of this study supports earlier claims: a transport station is a place of high mobility, a locus of urbanisation and modernity, and a marker of a city's identity.

Mobility, which is usually defined as the capacity for moving people, goods, and information, is central to social life and urbanisation (e.g. Hanson, 2015; Jonas, 2015; Sheller & Urry, 2016). While transport establishes nodes and builds networks that link city spaces through infrastructure and services, its essential function of mobility is confirmed. The present research evaluates how major public transport hubs in Chongqing deliver mobility at two scales: a citywide (macroscopic) scale and a station-area (microscopic) scale. As shown in Figure 4.2, the study sites are distributed across the core urban area of Chongqing. Within the city, metros, ferries

and coaches traverse mountainous terrain and river corridors to form an integrated network that enables residents and visitors to move efficiently between city districts. Meanwhile, high-speed railway stations and the international airport connect Chongqing to regional, national, and international destinations, functioning as nodes within a broader transit network. Together, these systems support the continuous circulation of passengers, goods, and information both within and outside the city, contributing to mobility and urbanisation.

Chapter 6 adopted the authentic perspective of a passenger and narrated a train journey in the sequence it is actually experienced, to show how the functional zones of a high-speed railway station work together to deliver a smooth trip and foster mobility. With the partial exception of the commercial area, which allows relatively flexible entry and exit, the zones most directly tied to transport operations: the station square, security screening, waiting halls, boarding area, and arrival/transfer interfaces, follow a fixed, non-interchangeable order. In this multi-functional large-scale building, signage, circulation design, and staff coordination collectively channel passengers through this predetermined, regulated sequence, ensuring orderly passenger flow and the reliable functioning of the station as a transport hub.

Cresswell (2006) identifies urban transport systems, especially international airports, as emblematic of modernity and postmodernity. Chambers (1987) describes how large transport hubs assemble bookstores, banks, post offices, leisure amenities, and security screening into a “miniaturised city” through reproducing key functions. Similarly, the key findings of this research illustrate how Chongqing’s major transport hubs mirror this pattern. At large-scale hubs such as the airport and high-speed railway stations, infrastructures, stores, and circulation design are integrated with passenger flows to create modern spaces that weave together culture, ideology, commerce, and governmental regulation. Smaller hubs also embed auxiliary functions: for example, the Crown Escalator includes a post office offering cultural-

creative merchandise and mailing services, while Hongyadong Wharf provides ethnic-costume rentals and commercial photography. Such alignments of business planning with passenger route design expand commercial opportunities and the function of modern transport hubs. Meanwhile, metro stations and coach stations display Party-history and patriotic propaganda, promoting the circulation and dissemination of ideology within the transportation space.

These spaces also illustrate what Cresswell (2006) terms the “politics of mobility”. Transport station signage is centrally produced and top-down in form and content; access is conditional, enforced through identity, ticket, and baggage checks that exclude non-compliant travelers. The airport and high-speed railway further stratify passengers by class through first-class lounges and premium services, privileging “higher-status” passengers with “seamless mobility” during transit. In Chongqing, as elsewhere, transport hubs thus function not only as conduits of movement but also as multi-layered modern spaces which are culturally, economically, and politically constructed.

Finally, the analysis of Jiangbei International Airport in Chapter 7 underscores the role of an international airport in shaping a city’s identity. Aligning with Li and Yang’s (2022) discussion of the airport in Shanghai, the frequent use of English, alongside multilingual signs of Korean and Japanese, communicates “a message of cosmopolitanism, diversity and warm welcome to travelers” (p. 167). In parallel, the promotion of local cultural markers, from dialect signage to the emblematic “Yellow Ferrari,” projects regional pride. Ongoing enhancements such as expanded self-service technologies, women-only security lanes, and dedicated services for passengers with special needs signal a commitment to inclusivity and operational modernity. Taken together, these features position the airport as both a gateway and a stage on which Chongqing articulates its aspirations toward a more modern and international urban identity.

Overall, while transport hubs are not locations regularly studied in LL, this research elaborately demonstrates the specific functions and significance of transport hubs in a city, highlighting their differences from other public spaces or third places.

8.2.2 Reconsideration of the role of language on signs

In examining language use on public signs, this study classifies photographic data by languages: Chinese-only signs and English-inclusive signs. Although most findings align with the mainstream views of previous research, this study also identifies several atypical empirical findings that prompt a reconsideration of the functions and roles of mother tongues and lingua francas in public spheres.

First, consistent with longstanding LL research, this study confirms the global dominance and typical symbolic role of English on signage in the public spaces of a non-English speaking region (e.g. Backhaus, 2006; Ben-rafael et al., 2006; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). Nevertheless, I also argue that in the context of Chongqing's public transport hubs, English is deployed primarily for communicative purposes rather than as a symbolic marker.

Existing LL research consistently highlights the hegemonic role of English in public signage across the world. Surveys of major Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Ningbo likewise report the pervasive presence of English, often treating its high visibility in public space as an index of modernisation, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism (Cai & Hirzel, 2025; Shang, 2024). Scholars also interpret English's association with luxury, taste, and quality in advertisements, brand names, and storefronts as a case of language commodification (Han & Shang, 2024).

The key findings of Chapter 5 confirm these claims: English does possess high status and symbolic value in Chongqing's transport hubs. Across 1,852 photographs, English appeared on every bilingual or multilingual sign, and a small number of signs were English-only. Accordingly, this study's taxonomy of signage introduced an

“English-inclusive” category to capture all instances in which Chinese was not the sole language on a sign. The prevalence of English-inclusive signage (see Chart 5.2), exceeding 50% at the airport, metro stations, the Crown Escalator, and high-speed railway stations, indicates a strong position for English within Chongqing’s transport system. Advertising sign data further support this pattern (see Chart 5.6): English translation is common, though typically partial (78.76%). Although further classification was not applied, given that most ads derive from nationally or globally recognised brands, their presentation in Chongqing likely aligns with practices in other Chinese cities, underscoring English’s commercial salience and its symbolic meanings.

However, while the findings presented here acknowledge the function of English as a lingua franca with a strong symbolic character, it has also been argued that its primary role in Chongqing’s transport hubs is communicative rather than symbolic. In these highly functional environments, English serves foremost to facilitate wayfinding, safety, and operational clarity for diverse passenger groups, even as it simultaneously signals modernity and supports commercial branding.

From the perspective of statistical data results and contributions to qualitative analysis, English plays a role in communication. Chart 5.4 in Section 5.5 indicates that among signs performing primarily informative functions, 78.66% of directional signs and 57.41% of notices are English-inclusive. Chart 5.6 shows that 64.73% of directional signs and 53.87% of notices are fully translated into English, signaling a clear intent to make wayfinding and regulatory information accessible to English readers. Qualitative analyses reinforce this interpretation.

In Section 6.5.1, waiting-area signage routinely pairs Chinese with English to identify facilities (e.g. toilets, water dispensers) and to convey safety and etiquette reminders (e.g. cleanliness, hot water warnings), thereby enabling foreign passengers to follow guidance and use the public services provided by the station effectively. Similarly,

Figure 7.9 in Chapter 7 shows English prompts in the children's play area that specify usage requirements; here, English performs a communicative function on par with Chinese, helping sustain the orderly, welcoming "third-place" atmosphere intended for passengers, which once again confirms that English in Chongqing's public transportation has gone beyond merely being a symbolic meaning as a "lingua franca" of globalisation, and now plays a role in communicating actual information with foreign passengers in practical places and applications.

The distribution of English across sign types is also informative. Directional signs exhibit higher English coverage and higher full-translation rates than all the other categories, aligning with the essential functions of transport hubs in navigation and transportation. This asymmetry suggests a functional prioritisation: core wayfinding is standardised and multilingual, while ancillary or transient messaging may lag. The result is a layered communicative ecology in which essential movement through space is robustly supported in English, whereas peripheral information remains more locally oriented.

In addition to English, the dataset includes a small number of signs in Japanese and Korean. These are concentrated mainly in the international airport, especially Terminal 3, with one additional instance on a directional sign near the Chaotianmen Wharf. Within the public transportation context, Japanese and Korean serve a purely communicative function. They provide information and direction without conveying any symbolic or indexical meaning. Though their target readers and relevant use scenarios are far more limited than those for Chinese and English, and though these languages appear infrequently, their presence addresses the practical needs of a small group of international travelers, acting as an officially provided language service.

Several factors may be driving this pattern. First, transportation infrastructures serve as obligatory passage points for international visitors. As such, the communicative demands at these sites are elevated: wayfinding, safety, information, and service

updates must be universally intelligible. The airport connects Chongqing to the wider world and is one of the main points of entry to the city of Chongqing. The metro links intra-urban areas and is the primary mode of transport within the city. Second, ongoing expansion and modernisation of airport terminals, high-speed railway stations, and metro stations in Chongqing in recent years has likely yielded newer sign inventories with more systematic language planning, thereby increasing the prevalence and completeness of English translations.

Together, these forces reflect the language profile of the intended user base, indicating that Chongqing is expecting more foreign visitors. From a practical standpoint, the high visibility of foreign languages on public signs evidence Chongqing's progress toward globalisation and cosmopolitination. This finding is in line with prior research (e.g. Liao & Chan, 2024; Xiao & Lee, 2022) suggesting that the rising globalisation in Chinese cities is likely to continually increase the visibility of foreign language especially English, intensify bilingual or even multilingual interaction, and enhance the communicative function of foreign languages in public-space signage and language practices.

It is also worth noting that transport hubs are distinct from other types of public spaces. As discussed in section 8.2.1, transport hubs are highly regulated and monitored authoritative spaces. These spaces are subject to strict language use policies reflecting official language ideology, and thus the generalisation of this finding may limit.

An equally important point is that LL research on urban China typically regards Chinese characters as the primary informative language, since they hold the most significant communication role (e.g. Han & Shang, 2024; Xia & Xia, 2024). The findings of this study further confirm this conclusion. As displayed in Chapter 5, the results from combining Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 demonstrate that 99.9% of collected signs in this study were found to contain Chinese characters, while more than half of

the signs at three coach stations (69.35%) and two wharfs (66.29%) were exclusively in Chinese, indicating that Chinese serves an absolute communicative function in these contexts. The dominance of the national language and its informative function in the local environment is therefore unquestionable.

This study also identified symbolic functions of Chinese in public spaces. First, as discussed in Chapter 5, Traditional Chinese characters remain visible at various research sites despite no longer being officially in use. Traditional Chinese characters are often used to index historical continuity, cultural heritage, or function as an aesthetic symbol of “classical elegance”. In contemporary public settings, they are therefore frequently found in the logos of long-standing enterprises, such as the newspaper “Chongqing Daily.” Even if the names of some enterprises have been simplified in modern daily use, the earlier traditional forms are still readily observable on signage in public places. Traditional Characters are also commonly used strategically in advertising for conventional Chinese products such as *baijiu* and tea, signaling an authentic origin and a long-established market presence. These findings align with Lu et al.’s (2020) study, which investigates the symbolic meaning of Traditional Chinese characters in a tourist village in Anhui Province, adopted for their association with “authentic Chineseness.”

Similarly, although Pinyin falls within the Chinese linguistic system, its use in public transport spaces primarily serves a symbolic, rather than communicative function. As the examples in Section 5.3.2 and 5.3.3 demonstrate, Pinyin typically appears directly below Chinese text or in a smaller font positioned alongside it. Such layouts are especially common on English-inclusive signs, on which English also tends to occupy a secondary visual position, functioning as an annotation or supplement to the dominant Chinese text. In formal language education and standard practice in China, Pinyin is normally placed above the corresponding Chinese characters, with tone marks clearly indicated. The Pinyin observed on public signage in this study,

however, consistently deviates from this convention and is used in a non-standard manner, which suggests that its purpose is not to facilitate pronunciation or comprehension for readers. Rather, the Roman-letter form of Pinyin produces a visual effect similar to that of English, thereby enriching the “multilingual” appeal of the signs on which it appears.

Taken together, this study’s empirical findings indicate diverse and dynamic language use across Chongqing’s public sphere. The communicative function of foreign languages, especially English, is noticeably strong and appears to be outpacing the symbolic function. At the same time, though Chinese is the undisputable main language of communication, elements from within the Chinese language system can also be observed operate as symbols of “Chineseness” and as decorative semiotic resources. From a sociolinguistic perspective, these results suggest that the functions of languages displayed in institutions such as transport hubs are not necessarily limited to supporting core operations. Instead, they may also be mobilised to serve broader symbolic and social functions, shaping a multilayered experience of encountering language in public space.

8.2.3 Extension of the framework of affective regimes

Drawing on the framework of affective regimes and existing scholarship, this study demonstrates the nuanced coupling of affects and semiotic resources through a case study of the Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport. It contributes to the expansion of affective regimes by adapting the concept to analyzing dynamics of a large, multimodal transport hub. By clarifying how different affects are engineered and modulated in one space, this study treats CKG as a living place where multiple affective experiences are orchestrated. By acknowledging this complexity, the study not only enhances the theoretical applicability of affective regimes to large, multifunctional spaces but also provides a methodological model for future research

that seeks to account for the richness and diversity of emotional experiences in the linguistic landscape.

This study strengthens Wee and Goh's (2019) claim that different affective regimes can coexist in the same place by offering empirical results. While existing studies (e.g. Motschenbacher, 2023; Yao, 2025) often assume a single-case illustrations of a particular affect, little research has attempted to recognise or examine the co-presence and layering of different affective mechanisms within the same space. This study had contended that in real-world settings, signs, behaviors, and infrastructural elements interact continuously; as these interactions shift, so too do the affective textures they generate.

Rather than isolating one dominant affect, this research treats CKG as a complex affective carrier. A simultaneous coding strategy was applied to distinguish multiple emotional materials and elements of hospitality, conviviality, romance, and nostalgia, which coexist within the same site. These affects emerge not only in physical signs and displays but also in embodied interactions and curated experiences that unfold across the airport's terminals, waiting areas, and retail zones. This analytical approach reveals the multidimensional character of affect in public space, where different emotional cues do not merely coexist passively but interact, reinforce, or occasionally contradict one another depending on context and audience. For instance, a passenger may simultaneously experience hospitality by seeing welcome information, then emotionally engage in romantic fan support activities, or feel responsible seeing behavioral regulations articulate shared norms for using a "third place" with clear expectations for conduct. They may also be moved and feel nostalgic seeing photo exhibitions depicting old Chongqing. These heterogeneous elements, each carrying distinct affective cues, operate in parallel, overlap without contradiction, and collectively shape passenger experience upon arrival.

I further argued that the effect of affective regimes in a public place varies across audiences and thus a given regime can be limited in both scope and impact. The same affective material does not elicit uniform responses across different groups. For example, foreign tourists are unlikely to access the intended nostalgia of Chongqing's historical narratives without English translation. Individuals who do not follow celebrities will not experience the romanticised feeling of belonging that billboard images produce for fans; conversely, they may encounter negative experience due to fan gatherings. In short, differences in background (e.g. language, habitus, age, etc.) can yield divergent affective experiences within the same space, making affective regimes resistant to full popularisation or generalisation.

Second, this study emphasised the importance of audience reception in understanding affective regimes. While previous scholarship has often distinguished between affect as shared emotion and feeling as individual responses, this study argues that subjective emotional feedback remains relevant and should be incorporated into affective analysis for a more concrete interpretation. In support of this view, the study utilised digitalised technology and algorithm circulation to draw on user-generated content from the Chinese social media platform Weibo. By analysing posts, comments, and engagement patterns, it investigated how passengers emotionally respond to airport signage, activity, and environment.

This method demonstrated the unique affordances of online LLs. Unlike traditional physical signage, which is constrained by time and space, online LLs enable emotional expressions to circulate widely and persist over time, thus not only enriching the empirical basis of affective analysis but also highlighting the growing interplay between physical and digital semiotic spaces.

Finally, this study brings the framework of affective regimes into conversation with Bourdieu's theory of capitals in examining how affects are converted into forms of capital in public spaces. In Chapter 7, the warm, hospitable interactions with

passengers and the proactive promotion of local cultural experiences in CKG are seen to contribute to enhancing the city's image and stimulating tourism, with the intention of producing economic capital. Bilingual and multilingual signage at the site cultivate linguistic capital by improving legibility for visitors from diverse backgrounds, thereby deepening cosmopolitan orientations, contributing to global capital, and generating symbolic capital by signalling respect and inclusion.

Finally, by making explicit the intentions behind these interventions and tracing how they accomplish specific objectives, this study offers new conceptual insights and methodological approaches for identifying and interpreting the complex functions of affect in public places: when affects align with institutional goals, they convert into capitals that can be reinvested. This study advances an approach that links intentional design to measurable outcomes. It makes explicit the objectives behind affective interventions and traces how they accomplish specific ends, combining data collection, and observation with indicators such as visitor feedback. This integrative perspective provides new conceptual tools and analytical methods for identifying and interpreting the complex functions of affect in public places. It also has practical implications: urban planners and sign producers should treat affect as a strategic resource.

8.3 Implications and limitations

This study analysed major public transport hubs in Chongqing using multiple data sources and a mixed-methods approach, yielding both theoretical and methodological contributions to linguistic landscape research.

For Chongqing, this study provides rich corpora and datasets for future sociolinguistic research. The detailed account of LLs in transportation system offers a lens for documenting and interpreting local culture and social life, which can serve as a reference point for social, linguistic, and cultural inquiries in a Chinese metropolis.

Beyond being available for comparative analysis with studies from other Chinese or even international cities, the materials collected here establish a baseline for future diachronic research in Chongqing. The discussion of language use in transport spaces offers a lens through which language practices in Chongqing's society can be closely examined. This study also provides practical insights for relevant local institutions regarding the deployment of linguistic and semiotic resources in public settings, for example, improving the design and emplacement of not only signage but also other semiotic resources towards better city-branding and globalisation.

In terms of transport hubs and similar public spaces or institutions, this study has practical implications for how signage can assist and reinforce the complex process of place-making. From a signage perspective, systematic analysis of the visual design and spatial placement of existing signs can inform iterative improvements in both design efficiency and user experience. From a language-use perspective, evidence on the current distribution and proportions of bi/multilingual signage in Chongqing's public transport, together with identified gaps (e.g., insufficient English instructions at self-service ticket-checking gates in high-speed rail stations) offers actionable guidance for future language policy and planning. Observed interactions among signs, people, and spaces provide relevant agencies with concrete examples and conceptual tools for enhancing public management.

For linguistic landscape research, this study broadens the theoretical and methodological toolkit not only for examining transport hubs but also for application of LL theory across a wider range of scenarios. First, it proposes a scalable approach to organizing and classifying large identification datasets that can be adapted to other dynamic public spaces. The original taxonomy developed in this study reflects the wide range of sign types found in contemporary urban settings. By considering signs in terms of their content, function, language, and form, the taxonomy offers a relatively comprehensive framework for describing the current linguistic landscape of

public spaces. It also has practical value beyond this study, as it may provide useful inspiration for the development of coding schemes in future linguistic landscape research.

Second, it demonstrates the combination of diverse theoretical frameworks (e.g. assemblage, geosemiotics, and affective regimes) for the purpose of deepening more particularised qualitative analyses. More importantly, it supports a growing body of research which suggests that LL study should reposition its analytic lens from signage as an isolated object to situating it within broader interactional practices and focusing on the practical social effects. Third, the study demonstrates the necessity of integrating online LL data into static LL research and provides methodological support towards this end.

There are also several limitations to the current work which warrant acknowledgement. The first limitation is the scale of online/virtual LL data. Although the project underscores the rationale for integrating online LL with offline observations, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7's deep qualitative analysis at single sites draw on a comparatively small amounts of online data. This asymmetry may constrain the robustness of claims about online semiotic practices and lead to its emergence as a supplement to the offline data results.

The second limitation relates to rapid infrastructural change. The data collection period of this research occurred from 2022–2023. However, subsequent openings of Jiangbei Airport T3B and Chongqing East High-speed Railway Station in late 2025 fall outside the sampling frame, leaving a more current panorama of Chongqing's major transport hubs incomplete.

The third limitation relates to the generalisability and comparability of this study's results. Differences in footfall, governance, and passenger mix across hubs limit straightforward generalisation. For example, the Crown Escalator is increasingly

becoming a tourist attraction focused on serving visitors, while metro stations are taking on an ever more central transportation role in local residents' everyday lives. A next step would be to adopt a stratified, multi-site design with matched indicators to enable stronger cross-hub and cross-city comparisons.

The fourth limitation concerns the scope of the qualitative analysis. Although Chapters 1 and 4 clearly state that the qualitative component of this study focuses only on two large-scale transport hubs and clarified the reason of this decision, this limited scope still may raise questions about the generalisability and consistency of the findings and observations. In the next stage of research, a single qualitative analytical framework, such as affective regimes, could be applied across all sites. This would help generate a more generalised perspective and better integrate the qualitative analysis with the quantitative dimension of the study.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the online dataset, and to code, trace, and analyse online data more systematically to ensure greater independence of the online data results. Researchers should also consider the changing and expansion of research sites. One means of doing so would be to implement a rolling research design to initiate supplementary data collection. By addressing these limitations, especially the scale of online data and the pace of infrastructural change, subsequent studies can provide a more complete and timely account of how Chongqing's (or other cities') public transport spaces evolve as multilingual, multifunctional, affectively charged landscapes.

8.4 Conclusion

This study has investigated the impact of the linguistic landscape on the social functions of public transport hubs and the generation of affective experiences in Chongqing, a megacity in Southwestern China. Noticing that prior LL research in China has predominantly focused on quantitative reports, this research foregrounds

the nuanced interactions between signage, people, and space. To address its research objectives, this study first mapped a panoramic view of LL of Chongqing's transport system through fourteen transport hubs across six transport means, then traced how signs participate in assembling and extending both physical and symbolic functions within a major high-speed railway station. Finally, the role of LL in helping to configure affect and forms of capital at the city's international airport was considered.

Methodologically, the project has adopted a mixed-methods design encompasses different methodologies and data sources. Multiple rounds of large-scale data collection provided a quantitative overview of sign categories, spatial distribution, and written languages across Chongqing's hubs. Complementing the quantitative analysis, this study conducted two qualitative analysis case studies with an ethnographic perspective. The first mobilised Pennycook's (2017) notion of assemblage to examine interactions among LL, semiotic resources, passengers, and spatial zones at Chongqing North High-Speed Railway Station. The second integrated Wee and Goh's (2019) concept of affective regimes with the Bourdieusian sociology to explain how passengers' emotions and experiences are shaped at the Jiangbei International Airport, and how social functions are constructed across both online and offline contexts.

Collectively, this research underscore LL's pivotal role in transforming transport facilities into living social activity spaces endowed with diverse symbolic functions and capable of shaping affective experience. The research explicates how sign–people–space interactions co-constitute social function and meaning and operationalises assemblage in a transport context. By coupling multi-layered affective regimes with capitals, this research clarifies how affects are not incidental to mobility but are structurally patterned and socially productive. Furthermore, this study demonstrates how large-scale LL mapping can guide and be deepened by ethnographically informed, zone-specific analysis.

Within LL scholarship, the southwestern region of China remains comparatively under-studied. This study offers a significant, reusable empirical corpus and an in-depth, comprehensive account of transport stations as highly functional and distinctive public-space institutions, enabling replication, comparison, and diachronic extension of LL research in China and other transport spaces.

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