SITUATING LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN TIME AND SPACE:
A MULTIDIMENSIONAL STUDY OF THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF
WASHINGTON, DC CHINATOWN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the interaction between language and discourse and the three dimensions of place: material space, spatial representation, and spatial practice. Specifically, I look at the uniform bilingual Chinese-English linguistic landscape of Washington, DC Chinatown, a small ethnic urban neighborhood with predominant presence of non-Chinese businesses and an ambivalent identity often perceived as inauthentic. While most studies on linguistic landscape approach it as multilingual language policy, I suggest that this concept can provide valuable insights into research on language and place, which has so far tended to focus on either spatial representation or spatial practice alone. It is thus necessary to re-conceptualize linguistic landscape as temporally situated cultural text and spatially contextualized semiotic-material object.

Data were collected during 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the neighborhood, using methods including photography, participant observation,
interviews, video recordings of community meetings, and collection of public policy documents.

First, a systematic analysis of the linguistic, visual and material features of shop signs reveals Chinatown’s linguistic landscape as a concrete instantiation of Foucault’s *heterotopia*, a place where multiple times and spaces are juxtaposed. Further, by situating linguistic landscape on multiple temporal and spatial scales, this study finds that Chinatown’s ambivalent place-identity is shaped by a variety of social, historical, political, and economic factors. Its ritual image is the product of the reestablished political and economic connection between Chinese immigrants and their home country. Its shrinking size is a consequence of intensified urban revitalization in Washington, DC over the past twenty years and new immigrants’ preference to settle in the suburbs. The incongruence between Chinatown’s ritual image and lived place is reinforced by the unequal distribution of communicative, political and economic resources between the Chinese community and commercial developers.

Thus, this study illuminates the key linguistic, economic, and political resources shaping the discursive construction of Washington, DC Chinatown. In so doing, it also illustrates how visual and material language such as linguistic landscape mediates between the cultural representation of a place and the political economic processes of its production.
To Ron and Suzie

For your work inspired every page of this dissertation
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

“WHERE IS CHINATOWN?”

In the morning of October 9, 2007, on my way to teach the weekly English for Beginners class at the Chinatown Community Cultural Center (CCCC), a well dressed young Asian women in a suit stopped me at the street corner of Walt Whitman Way and 7th Street and asked, “Excuse me, where is Chinatown?” Surprised at the question, I had to think for a second to find the words. “This is Chinatown right here,” I answered. She replied in disbelief, “Yeah, there’re Chinese writings all over, but I can’t find any Chinese restaurants.” She was right. On these couple blocks of 7th Street between I and G Streets were Legal Seafood, Ruby Tuesday, La Tasca, California Tortilla, Radio Shack, and Fuddruckers on our right. Across the street on our left, the big TV screen hanging off the outside of the Verizon Center was playing MSNBC financial news. People streamed in and out of McDonald’s with their coffee and breakfast, and the doors of retail chains such as Ann Taylor, City Sports, and Urban Outfitters were not yet open. Learning that she was looking for a restaurant to have some dim sum for breakfast, I asked her to follow me, leading her back
toward the spectacular archway that she missed. Turning right onto H Street, I showed her the few remaining Chinese restaurants left on this block between 7th and 6th Street, pointing at a green vinyl banner advertising in bright yellow “Dim Sum – 30% off” across the street from the building where Chinatown Community Culture Center was located.

Coming from Chicago and having lived in the much bigger Chinatown there, this lady was disappointed. However, in the many months following this chance encounter at the early stage of the dissertation project, I found her sentiment to be frequently shared. Many people I have spoken with found Washington, DC Chinatown to be not only small but also inauthentic. They would ask, “Are there any Chinese people living there?” Its surface, rather unanimously inscribed with Chinese characters and English shop names, has even attracted much skepticism and criticism in the local press. “Varnish or vanish?” Reporter Jennifer Moore (2005) asks in the title of her feature article for the *Washington AsiaPress*. Put more bluntly, Felix Gillette (203) contributes an article called “Year of the Hooter: The District’s Chinese character gets lost in the translation” in *The Fake Issue of the CityPaper*. However, for the members and leaders of the Chinatown Steering Committee (CSC) - the community organization chiefly responsible for screening, approving, or rejecting shop sign designs in Chinatown, language, or more narrowly, Chinese orthography - is one
of the few means that they still have to preserve the Chinatown in downtown Washington, DC.

Motivated to move beyond the surface of this intriguing phenomenon, in this dissertation, I look at the mandatory bilingual English-Chinese commercial signage in DC Chinatown as a cultural text as well as a semiotic-material artifact, and analyze its role in reconstructing the identity of Chinatown as a tourist destination and commodified ethnic enclave. I begin the analysis in Chapter Four with a systematic description of shop signs using the geosemiotic framework (spatially grounded analysis of meaning; Scollon and Scollon 2003), suggesting that the linguistic landscape of Chinatown is a concrete instantiation of Foucault’s (1986 [1967]) heterotopia. Then in Chapter Five, I trace the flow of this linguistic landscape as a cultural text in multiple historical processes (Silverstein and Urban 1996; Scollon and Scollon 2004; Lemke 2000), beginning with community meetings discussing the design of a single storefront at the micro level, to the making of the design policy at the intermediate level, and finally to the history of Chinese immigration to the United States at the macro level. From these multiple processes of producing linguistic landscape, I discern the shifting and asymmetrical participation structures and the unequal distribution of linguistic, economic, and political resources. In Chapter Six, turning to the spatial dimension of the analysis, I locate Chinatown’s linguistic landscape in a
multilingual urban environment (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005 a & b), which is organized around multiple centers of social interaction that are segregated along ethnic, racial, and linguistic boundaries. On top of this polycentric local space, Chinatown’s place identity is simultaneously construed through discursive links to places on national and global scales. Thus, I argue that this conflicting identity of DC Chinatown as a deauthenticated ethnic enclave is a result of temporally disjointed historical processes and spatially incongruent sites of interaction, both of which are illuminated by ethnography-based analysis of language and discourse in their multiple semiotic and material forms.

In this introductory chapter, I first give a synthesized overview of research on *space* and *place* in various social scientific disciplines using a modified triadic model (Lefebvre 1991; Scollon and Scollon 2003). Then, I locate the work of sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists in relation to the three dimensions of this model: *material space*, *spatial representation*, and *spatial practice*. I suggest that linguistic landscape, as spatially situated visual and material language offers a vantage point for integrating these three aspects. Finally, I outline how I will address this theoretical challenge in the study of Washington, DC Chinatown in the present dissertation.
The word “space” in its ordinary sense conjures up an image that is empty yet at the same time everywhere. Its own definition depends on the existence of other tangible objects. It is the “thing” between the surface of the earth and the moon; it is the distance between two buildings; it is the air around me contained by the walls of this room; and it is the small amount of white between words and lines on this page. Given its primordial, physical, and natural quality, it is thus not too surprising that, for a long time, *space* was not at the center of social scientific consciousness (Soja 1989). In Foucault’s words, “Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectal, the immobile” during the nineteenth century, when scholars were preoccupied with time and history (quoted in Soja 1989, 4).

The second half of the twentieth century, however, has witnessed a gradual movement of *space* to the foreground in various social scientific disciplines (Soja 1989; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). During this period, space has become not simply a subject of investigation but more importantly a model of conceptualization. In sociology, for example, Bourdieu (1991) suggests that “sociology presents itself as a social topology. Accordingly, the social world can be represented in the form of a (multi-dimensional) space constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution…” (1991, 299; original emphasis). In anthropology, this new focus on space invites researchers to
examine the formerly neglected location of culture and rekindles a sense of critical reflectivity on the relationship between the anthropologists and the people whom they study (Rodman 1992). As Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga observe, “Anthropologists are rethinking and reconceptualizing their understandings of culture in spatialized ways” (2003, 1). Even in the field of geography, increasing attention has been paid to the human interactions with natural and physical environments, culminating in the founding of a new sub-discipline commonly known as human geography (Tuan 1977).

*Definitions*

As the understanding of the social significance of space deepens during this interdisciplinary movement, scholars have found it necessary to revise the definition of the word or find another term, and the result is an array of varied definitions across disciplines, which can sometimes be confusing. *Space*, in human geography, is reserved for referring to the physical location of objects in the world and the objective and natural context of human activities (Entrikin 1991 cited in Johnstone 2004, 67). For example, Chinatown in Washington, DC can be cartographically defined as the physical space enclosed by Massachusetts
Avenue, K Street, G Place, 5th Street, and 8th Street\(^1\). *Place*, on the other hand, is adopted by human geographers to refer to the subjective experience of space, socially constructed (Entrikin 1991 cited in Johnstone 2004, 67). Thus, the place of Chinatown can be discursively formulated as “a historical ethnic enclave,” “the center of downtown DC,” or “a gentrified urban neighborhood.” As I will discuss in more details later in Chapter 5, the Chinese lexical label for Chinatown has also shifted over time, reflecting the changing sociopolitical tie between immigrants and their homeland.

Probably because it is blurry, the distinction between *space* and *place* is, however, not strictly adhered to in every social scientific discipline. In order to avoid the “lingering sense of primordiality and physical composition” associated with the word “space,” the sociologist Edward Soja (1989) uses the term *spatiality* instead of place to refer to “the created space of social organization and

\(^1\) However, we will not be able to talk about “space” without language, either. As we will see later in Chapter 6 that this cartographic definition of Chinatown’s boundary is also discursively constructed and changes over time with the shift of urban planning priority. Thus, the distinction between *space* and *place* is not absolute, but the former emphasizes the physical quality of *space* and the latter emphasizes the cultural meaning of *space*.  

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production” (79). In most anthropological research, both terms are adopted, perhaps because for anthropologists space is rarely understood as not being socially constructed, and hence, the need for a term to refer to the physical space is not as great as it is for geographers. For instance, in their introduction to a reader of anthropological work on space and place, Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) summarize this rather vast body of work by using thematic labels such as “embodied space” and “inscribed space,” indicating a sense of space that is socially constructed through human activities ranging from the spatial movement of the human body and storytelling. Furthermore, researchers of face-to-face interactions (e.g. Goffman 1963; Hall 1966; Kendon 1978) have also long been interested in how people’s use of personal space is conditioned by cultural norms and at the same time influences situated social interactions. In this dissertation, I will more or less follow the distinctive use of space and place as defined by human geographers, with the former emphasizing the material quality of a geographic area and the latter emphasizing discursively formulated place identity. However, I will also sometimes use “space” to indicate personal distance or an area that does not correspond with physical geographic boundary but is instead created instead through human movement, for example, “activity space” (Kendon 1978; Massey 1995; Jones 2004). I will use “place” to refer to geopolitical entities that usually have already been assigned place names.
Despite this diverse array of terms (the definitions of which on the surface appear sometimes to be incompatible), three aspects of space and place emerge as focuses of different strands of research, namely material space, spatial representation, and spatial practice. In order to show how sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists relate to this wider body of work, in the following section, I will summarize exemplar research of each theme, focusing mainly on anthropological, geographical, and sociological work.

**Three Dimensions: Material Space, Spatial Representation, and Spatial Practice**

In his influential book *The Production of Space*, the sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) proposes a triadic model of the socially constructed space (similar to place defined by human geographers): spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space (visually represented in Figure 1.1 below).
Figure 1.1: Lefebvre (1991)’s triadic model of the social production of space

According to Lefebvre (1991 [1974]), *spatial practice* is “a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice” (31), or plainly speaking, what people do in a certain physical space. Both *representations of space* and *representational space* involve people’s conception and experience of space, i.e. place. The difference between these two terms is that Lefebvre uses the former to refer specifically to dominant representations produced by powerful social groups and the latter to refer to the lived spatial experience of ordinary denizens. As Modan (2007) observes, the separation between dominant spatial representation and the everyday experience of space is not always decisive. To borrow an example from her ethnographic study of Mount Pleasant, another neighborhood in Washington, DC, an urban planner who is involved in the neighborhood’s planning is at the same time a resident. Thus, it is difficult to
classify her sense of place as *representation of space* or *representational space*. Owning as well to other more general theoretical reasons (such as the often less straightforward definition of the powerful and the powerless groups in practice), Modan (2007) has chosen to combine these two aspects of Lefebvre’s triad into a single category – *spatial representation* (312).

While I follow Modan’s suggestion to combine the two kinds of spatial representations, I also feel it is necessary to re-establish a triadic model by reinserting *material space* (defined below) into it one of the three dimensions. This allows me to include research on urban space that analyzes the circulation of capital in the following summary. More importantly, it also takes into consideration the economic and political forces behind the discursive construction of Washington, DC Chinatown. The modified triadic model is represented in Figure 1.2 below.

![Figure 1.2: Modified triadic model of the social production of space and place](image-url)
Beginning with material space as the first dimension of this modified model, research in this area typically focuses on either the kinds of resources employed in the creation of the built environment or material space itself as an economic resource, and less frequently on the form of the material space (cf. Wells 2007). For example, the sociologist David Harvey explains the periodic pattern of investment in urban environment using the Marxist distinction between the primary and secondary circuits of capital (Lake 1983). According to David Harvey (1983), when there is a problem with investment in the primary circuit (involving industries that produce goods and services for immediate profit), capital flows into the secondary circuit in the form of long-term investment in infrastructure and the built environment. Smith (1983) further extends Harvey’s theory to explain urban gentrification and revitalization as the result of commercial flow in the secondary circuit. Material space is also a frequently contested resource in itself. For example, in developing and marketing tourist sites, there is often a conflict of interest between the developers (government and corporations) and local inhabitants of the site (Greenwood 1989 and Boiseevain 1996 as cited in Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). These conflicts are not simply about monetary gains. Contestation over material space is also a manifestation of other larger yet less visible social and ideological struggles (McDonogh 1992).

The second emphasis in this vast body of research on space and place is on
representation, that is, on place as a symbolic construction as opposed to a material product. Within the field of human geography, Tuan (1991) argues that too much emphasis has been placed on the economic and material forces in making place. He suggests that more attention should be paid instead to the role of language. Examining a wide range of examples collected from explorers’ field notes, myths in indigenous communities, names of geopolitical regions (e.g. Asia), literary work set in cities (e.g. London), and even friendly conversations at home, Tuan argues that a narrative-descriptive approach comes closest to the complex human experience of place. This complexity is also acknowledged by anthropologists Arjun Appadurai (1988) and Margaret Rodman (1992), who both reflect critically on the role of the anthropologist in constructing a spatial representation for the inhabitants of the place that could be overpowering instead of empowering. This polysemous nature of spatial representation creates room for control and resistance. Kuper (1972) argues that place often functions as “condensed symbols” in political events and their multiple meanings are activated according to various political interests. On the other hand, spatial representation can also be strategically employed by underrepresented groups to claim their ownership of land (Forbes 1999; Whittaker 1994).

Whereas research on spatial representation tends to focus on the role of various linguistic forms, especially narratives, in transforming material space into an experienced place, researchers (in particular, anthropologists), have looked at
how place is created through the interaction between the human body and the built environment. For instance, a meeting room is a different place during a Halloween Party from the same room during a dissertation defense. In the former scenario, people are freely standing or sitting in various group formations, and there are often multiple interactions going on simultaneously; in the second kind of scenario, participants (except the candidate when he or she is making a presentation), are required to be seated, and there is usually, at least required by the implicit norm, a single interaction with a sustained focus on the candidate and their committee members. Bourdieu (1977) argues that it is exactly through this sort of spatial practice that the social structure and norms become ingrained in *habitus*, the somatic, emotional, and moral disposition of human beings (see also clear definitions in Scollon 2001 and Hanks 2005). Because of his attention on spatial practice, Bourdieu is hailed for going beyond the structuralist paradigm which links concrete physical space with abstract social structure without the mediation of practice (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003).

The divergence and convergence of these three aspects of *space* and *place* provide a useful heuristic for understanding and interpreting contemporary social phenomena. The process of globalization can be seen in many ways as a reconfiguration of the connection between *lived space* created by *spatial practice* and *material space*. For example, many Chinatowns emerged when Chinese immigrants moved overseas, settled close to each other, and then re-embedded
their familiar spatial practices from their home country in the new space. The issue of authenticity that so often arises in heritage tourist sites (e.g. Gable and Handler 1996; Hendersen 2000; Ooi 2002) results from the mismatch between spatial representation and spatial practice. Finally, what Baudrillard (2001) calls a hyperreal space (e.g. Disneyland) is in its essence a set of spatial representation and spatial practice completely divorced from the material space.

Therefore, taking all these three aspects of space and place into consideration, we will have a toolbox to help us understand better globalization, authenticity, and hyperreality, as interrelated social issues that frequently manifest in the controversies over the ambivalent identity and future of Washington, DC Chinatown. But where is language in this triadic model? How can sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists contribute to this analytical toolbox? In the following section, I give a brief overview of how sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological research has addressed the topic of space and place. I then suggest that in order to integrate all three dimensions of the triadic model in our analysis, it is necessary to expand the variety of linguistic forms that we examine, especially the visual and material forms of language use.

**LOCATING THE LINGUIST’S PLACE**

From the above discussion, it seems evident that researchers who study language use in its social context have an important contribution to make in improving our
understanding of how space is imbued with social-cultural meaning and thus transformed into place. As the human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1991, 684) remarks:

Words alone, used in an appropriate situation, can have the power to render objects, formally invisible because unattended, visible, and impart to them a certain character: thus a mere rise on a flat surface becomes something far more – a place that promises to open up to other places – when it is named ‘Mount Prospect’.

Unsurprisingly, in the following review of existing research on the interrelationship between language and space, we will see that much has been written on the correlation and dialectic connection between linguistic forms and spatial representation and about what I will call place-related linguistic practices. However, there is relatively less research investigating the connection of language to spatial practice and even less so material space.

Place is perhaps one of the earliest variables that has been correlated with language use. The subject of traditional dialectology, a major contributor to the birth of modern sociolinguistics, was essentially the correlation between linguistic features (phonological, lexical and morphosyntactic) and geographic areas (Milroy and Gordon 2003). Labov, Ash, Boberg (2006)’s Atlas of North American English is a contemporary endeavor of such kind. While these studies have provided us with an indispensable macroscopic description of linguistic
situations of certain territories, as Johnstone (2004) points out, “in most work in
dialectology and variationist sociolinguistics, place has been implicitly conceived
of in objective, physical terms” (65). Eckert (2004) further observes that even the
notion of speech community tends to be taken as the equivalent of a geographic
unit (see also Patrick 2002).

But more recently, sociolinguists have taken a step further to consider a
more nuanced relationship between language and spatial representation,
including linguistic forms on various levels. On the level of phonological
variation, Labov (1972)'s pioneering work on Martha’s Vineyard first pointed to
the influence of incoming vacationers on the reinforcement of islander identity
reflected in pronunciation. This theme was renewed in Schilling-Estes (1997)'
discussion of the increase of /ay/ raising in Smith Island English, an endangered
dialect, as an indication of heightened awareness of islander identity in declining
economy and population. In her study of the speech of adolescent girls in a high
school in suburban Detroit, Eckert (2004) shows us an interesting correlation
between the phonological features of /uh/ backing and /ay/ raising and the
participants' different socio-geographic orientations. While jocks orient toward
institutions, burnouts orient instead locally toward the Detroit conurbation.
More recently, Podesva (2008) finds a striking correlation between the increased
usage of the phonological feature (-t deletion) and speakers’ negative attitudes
toward urban gentrification processes in Washington, DC. On the lexical level,
Johnstone and colleagues’ studies in Pittsburg have found that lexical features of dialects are even commodified as folk lexicology, for the profits that it generates in the city’s tourist economy (Johnstone 2005). Another linguistic feature that has been intensively studied in relation to place is, unsurprisingly, place names. Myers (2006) observes that in face-to-face interaction, such as the introductory phase of focus group interviews, place names are frequently appropriated by interlocutors as resources for identity management. Cultural anthropologists (e.g. Blu 1996) have also gained insights into local organizations of social structures through uncovering the variety of place names used by different communities to refer to same area. On yet a higher level of language use, discourse analysts (e.g. Tannen 2005 [1984]) have identified conversational styles that can be associated with geographic regions. For example, a discourse feature that is often associated with New Yorkers is “machine-gun” questions. Regardless of the levels of analysis, this line of research shares a common concern with the linguistic practices drawing on place as a resource for the representation and construction of social identities. Thus, I will call this first line of research place-related linguistic practices, in order to contrast with the other line of research examining the connection between linguistic and spatial practices, which I label spatially situated linguistic practices and discuss later in this section.

Another kind of sociolinguistic research focuses on how discourse is constructed to formulate place. In other words, it is concerned with spatial
representation. Here language becomes one of the main semiotic means by which place, as “social construction par excellence” (Boas 1934 quoted in Basso 1988, 101), comes into existence. It is therefore not surprising to find narrative among the most often studied forms of language in connection with this experiential view of place, for narrative, like place, is also a phenomenological concept, a chief means through which human beings recapitulate, organize, and construct experiences, and thereby learn about the world around us (Schiffrin 1994; Berger 1997). As Bruner (1984) remarks, “names may construct the landscape but stories make the site resonate with history and experience” (1984, 5). To illustrate the constructive power of narrative in place-making, researchers often turn to public discourses. For example, Johnstone (1990) examined a corpus of local newspaper stories about the flood in Fort Wayne in 1982 and found that the city was increasingly portrayed as an animate heroic figure who “saved itself” (1990, 109-125). In Finnegans (1998)'s study of Milton Keynes, a new city in southern-central England, urban planning documents portray the city as organically growing into an ideal place for people to live and work, in stark contrast to the story circulated in the mass media, which represents the city as a “concrete jungle,” “an artificial and unnatural settlement” (41). It is in these public stories that the ability of narrative in constructing place becomes most evident.

In addition to investigating the role of language in spatial representations, a few researchers have also examined spatially situated linguistic practices on
various spatial scales. That is how linguistic practices are interrelated with spatial practices, the second dimension of the modified triadic model. For example, on the micro spatial scale, the anthropologist Charles Frake (1975) observes that in the single physical space of a Yakan house, spatial practices create fluid spatial boundaries which shape linguistic practices taking place within them. On a wider spatial scale of an Indonesian village, Kuipers (1988) finds that the marginalization of local traditional linguistic practices goes in tandem with spatial marginalization. Duranti (1997)’s research on the domestic spatial practices of West Samoan immigrants in Los Angeles further connects imperative speech acts to spatial practices of sitting on the floor, which serve as a bridge between the new place of dwelling and their home culture.

As Irvine (1989) and Manning (2006) have pointed out, ever since de Saussure, there is often a separation between words and things, ideas and forms, language and materiality, and very few studies have systematically examined the relation between linguistic forms and practices and the material space, with the notable exception of Ron and Suzie Scollon’s (2003) geosemiotic framework. In their book Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World, they stress the important forces of material form, physical emplacement, and physical location in the shaping of linguistic meaning. To borrow their example, a stop sign will not take full effect until it is installed on the street corner. In addition to paying attention to material space, this geosemiotic framework also allows us to take
into consideration the spatial practice dimension of the triadic model, as it integrates Goffman (1983)'s *interaction order*, that is, visible, spatial patterns of social interaction (e.g. backstage vs. frontstage spatial behaviors), as part of what they call a geosemiotic aggregate.

Thus, for the present dissertation research, I find the geosemiotic framework a very useful tool for integrating sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological research on the three dimensions of space and place. Moreover, Scollon and Scollon (2003)'s work points us to a source of linguistic data that had tended to be neglected until recently, that is, the visual and material forms of language present in a certain geographic area, or as referred to by many others, linguistic landscape.

**LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AS VISUAL AND MATERIAL LANGUAGE**

As I will discuss in further detail later in the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, most existing research on linguistic landscape has approached it as a multilingual phenomenon, an example of *de facto* language policy (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Spolsky 2004). However, in this dissertation, I take linguistic landscape as a valuable source of data which bears close physical connection to material space, which is a type of visual spatial representation, which is the culmination of a temporal trajectory of linguistic practices, and which transforms space into place by forming a geosemiotic aggregate with spatial practices. In other words, I
believe linguistic landscape provides a vantage point from which to examine the interrelationship between language and all three aspects of the triadic spatial production model.

If we take a moment to examine the meaning and etymology of the second word in the term linguistic landscape with Gorter (2006 c), it is not hard to see its intricate connection with material space and its representation. In the *New Oxford American Dictionary* (2nd Edition), the first meaning of landscape is: “all the visible features of an area of countryside or land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal.” Used in this sense, linguistic landscape is the aggregate of all visible linguistic forms on the surface of a geographic area (Landry and Bourhis 1997).

The word “landscape” originated in late 16th century, from the Middle Dutch word “lantscap,” “denoting a picture of natural scenery.” Thus, its second meaning refers to “a picture representing an area of countryside,” “the genre of landscape painting,” or figuratively, the distinctive features of a particular situation or intellectual activity, as in the political landscape of a certain country. Thus, in this second sense of the word, linguistic landscape is also a *representation* of the physical space that it is inscribed upon.

The word “representation” is italicized above because it has been extensively reflected upon extensively in critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough
1995, 2003) as well as in cultural studies (e.g. Benjamin 1969; Debray 1993; Spivak 1994 [1988]). There is a general consensus in these discussions that representation is by no means neutral. The “mimetic form of representation” is frequently interlaced with “the political form of representation” (Spivak 1994 [1988], 70). In other words, any form of representation also performs some kind of action on the represented object. Therefore, linguistic landscape is not only part of the visual make-up of a space but is also a form of spatial representation, and thus presents itself as an interesting linguistic form that bridges space and place.

In addition to its close material connection to space, the visual and material form of linguistic landscape itself offers opportunities to researchers for examining the multitude of linguistic, financial, and political resources invested in its production and for exploring social relationships among its producers. Hence, a contextualized study of linguistic landscape can show how processes of micro-level linguistic production are linked with issues of power and inequality in the macro-level political economy (cf. Irvine 1989; Manning 2006).

Hymes (1996 [1973]) argued a long time ago that language is diverse not only in its structure and function but also in its medium. Only by examining the diversity of all these three aspects of language use, says Hymes, can we fully address the question of language-related social inequality. However, as he points out, there is a long-standing bias against writing and the visual form of language in sociolinguistics as well as in linguistic anthropology (see also Basso 1974).
Consequently, compared with speech, we know much less about how written and visual language is produced and what kinds of resources are employed in its production. Thus, thanks to its relatively more public process of production, linguistic landscape provides an opportunity for us to start addressing this gap in research.

Further, researchers looking at linguistic landscape from a sociological perspective (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Ben-Rafael 2009) note that it is “made up of contributions by the largest variety of actors - institutions, associations, firms, individuals” (Ben-Rafael 2009). Therefore, as a product of collective action, it allows us to examine the complex participant framework of linguistic production, which is less easily discernible in the production and reception of individual utterances (Goffman 1981; Schiffrin 1987).

However, in order to best explore these great potentials of linguistic landscape, we will need to revise the way we conceptualize it and adopt a new framework for its study, which I shall propose and discuss at great length in Chapter 2. In the remaining space of this introductory chapter, I will give a chapter-by-chapter overview of the dissertation.

**Outline of Chapters**

By conducting a multidimensional study of the linguistic landscape of Washington, DC Chinatown, I explore the various roles that language plays in
place-making along all three dimensions of \textit{space} and \textit{place}, namely \textit{material space}, \textit{spatial representation}, and \textit{spatial practice}. Although as the reader will see later, each of the analytical chapters (Chapter 4, 5, and 6) reflects an emphasis on each of these dimensions, I choose not to use the triadic model as the organizational principle of the dissertation, because materiality, representation, and practice are more often interwoven than not. Rather, I use \textit{time} and \textit{space} as a heuristic guide for the analysis, with each chapter employing different theoretical frameworks as summarized in Table 1.1 below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Chapter 4: Geosemiotic analysis</th>
<th>Key theoretical frameworks and concepts</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]); visual analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996); geosemiotic analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2003)</td>
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| Chapter 5: Time                  | Production format (Goffman 1981); entextualization & recontextualization (Silverstein and Urban 1996); timescale (Lemke 2000; 2005); resemiotization (Iedema 2001, 2003); discourse cycles (Scollon and Scollon 2004); communicative resources (Hymes 1996 [1973]; Blommaert 2005) |

| Chapter 6: Space                 | Geosemiotic aggregate (Scollon and Scollon 2003); polycentricity and spatial scales (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005 a & b) |

\textbf{Table 1.1: Key theoretical frameworks and concepts in analysis chapters}
In Chapter 2, following a summary and synthesis of preceding research on linguistic landscape as a new approach to multilingual language policy, I suggest that it can be more productively conceptualized as a cultural text and a semiotic-material artifact, which opens up the field to two theoretical perspectives: one focusing on the temporal trajectory of text production (Silverstein and Urban 1996; Scollon and Scollon 2004) and the other focusing on the spatial contextualization of linguistic meaning (Scollon and Scollon 2003; Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005 a & b).

This integrated theoretical framework calls for a combination of research methods in order to understand how the linguistic landscape of DC Chinatown has transformed, altered, or contributed to its identity as a place from multiple angles. Chapter 3 describes the variety of methods employed in the current research project, including ethnographic observations, photographic and geosemiotic analysis of shop signs, interviews with Chinatown residents, community organizers, and daytime office workers, the maps of Chinatown drawn by these interviewees, analysis of other public discourses such as urban planning policies, documents specifically related to and Chinatown’s landscape design, and promotional materials distributed at the community center.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from a photographic and semiotic analysis of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape. Drawing largely from Kress and van
Leeuwen (1996)'s visual analysis and Scollon and Scollon (2004)'s geosemiotic frameworks, I develop a coding scheme that takes into consideration not only language choice in the shop signs but also visual features, such as layout, font size and color, as well as material characteristics, such as types of materials and permanency of emplacement. Based on a quantitative analysis of a nearly exhaustive sample, it is found that there are many subtle variations beneath the homogeneity of bilingual signage on the surface, which provides a concrete illustration of what Foucault (1986 [1967]) calls a heterotopia, a place where multiple temporal and spatial scales are juxtaposed. Thus, the next two chapters are devoted to understanding how Washington, DC Chinatown has become such a heterotopic place and what role its linguistic landscape plays in this process.

In Chapter 5, I situate Chinatown’s linguistic landscape in the temporal flows of its production. That is, as all other cultural texts, it is regarded not as a single, isolated text-artifact, but in Silverstein and Urban (1996)'s words, “a thingy-phase” of a much longer historical process. In addition, I incorporate the insights of Lemke (2000) and Scollon and Scollon (2004), and identify such historical process as composed of multiple timescales or discourse cycles. More specifically, the historical processes relevant to the production of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape range from the design of a single storefront to the historical waves of transnational immigration. Examining various types of public
discourses on these multiple timescales, I find that there is often a disconnection among them, which I suggest contributes to the resulting image of Chinatown that is frozen in tradition and history.

Chapter 6 locates linguistic landscape in space through both physical and discursive contextualization. First, following Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005 a & b)’s framework of polycentricity, I look at the neighborhood of Chinatown as multiple centers of interaction, which are regulated by various interactional regimes including language choice and interaction order. In contrast to the unanimously bilingual commercial signage (which can be seen as the wrapping paper of these cubes of interactions), the interactional regime inside is largely monolingual and monocultural. Thus, we see these sites of interactions as separated rather clearly along linguistic, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. In addition to this spatial contextualization, I look at the discursive alignment of Chinatown with other places. For some, in particular, the pro-preservation community organizers, Chinatown is often synonymously defined as a miniature version of China transplanted overseas and hence its future development is tied to the prosperity of the home country and its relationship with the host country. This alignment is, of course, frequently contested by others, who tend to be in support of the commercial development of Chinatown. For them, Chinatown is discursively embedded in downtown DC,
extremely valuable real estate. Further, this contention is characterized in a spatialized model. Under this model, *zi jiren* ("insiders") refers to ethnically Chinese people who support preservation, and *wainian de ren* ("outsiders") refers to "foreigners" and ethnically Chinese people who seek to gain profits from new development in Chinatown. Hence, again, here we observe frequent disjuncture in geographic space as well as discursive place.

I conclude by summarizing how the current multidimensional study of Washington, DC Chinatown’s linguistic landscape contributes to our understanding of the multiple roles that language plays in place-making. In particular, I will highlight the values and benefits of using visual and material linguistic data such as linguistic landscape for sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological research aiming to bridge cultural representation with political economy. Finally, I offer reflections on my own roles during the research process: that of researcher, Chinese student studying in the US, and community volunteer and how these have affected my analysis. Also in relation to the last role as a volunteer, I discuss how research findings can be and have been translated into a small, pilot community project as part of a broader effort to restore the discursive equilibrium of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape.
While existing research has tended to approach linguistic landscape from a language policy perspective, in this chapter I reconceptualize linguistic landscape as cultural text and semiotic-material object situated in both temporal and spatial contexts. I suggest that examining linguistic landscape from multiple dimensions could illuminate the social process of constructing, negotiating, and reconstructing place identity. Further, as visual and material language, linguistic landscape also has the potential to bridge the gap between the cultural representation and material construction of space. First, I will provide an overview of the increasing number of sociolinguistic studies of linguistic landscape and their common themes. Following the reconceptualization of linguistic landscape as cultural text, I will then outline an integrated framework organized along temporal and spatial dimensions.
LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE: ORIGIN, THEMES, AND POTENTIAL

Although the term *linguistic landscape* has been sometimes used to refer to the general linguistic situation of a given region (reviewed in Gorter 2006b), in the current study, I adopt the more widely accepted definition provided in Landry and Bourhis (1997, 25):

> The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.

In other words, *linguistic landscape* consists of all visual forms of language present in the public space of a pre-determined geographic area.

According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the notion of *linguistic landscape* originated in the field of language planning. In multilingual societies such as Belgium and Québec, representation of languages in the public sphere is of central concern for language planners. While recent research on *linguistic landscape* continues to flourish in this field (see the collections of articles in Gorter 2006, as well as in Shohamy and Gorter 2009), it is also expanding into neighboring disciplines, for example, applied linguistics (e.g. Shohamy and Waksman 2009), sociology (e.g. Ben-Rafael 2009), genre analysis (e.g. Hanauer 2009), and even dance studies (e.g. Katz 2008). Three common themes emerge
from this growing body of research on *linguistic landscape*: linking linguistic landscapes to social groups, structures, and processes; focusing on the comparison among linguistic varieties; employing digital photography as research method.

Following Landry and Bourhis (1997), it is commonly assumed that *linguistic landscape* performs two functions: informational and symbolic. In its informational function, it conveys to the observers information about the linguistic situation, boundaries of speech communities, as well as language used in face-to-face interactions (such as service encounters) in a given territory. Performing its symbolic function, linguistic landscape conveys meta-linguistic information about the relative power and status of the respective ethnolinguistic groups. As an illustration, crossing the border from the United State to Canada, one immediately notices the use of both English and French in all official signs, which reflects the officially bilingual situation of Canada. In Québec specifically, the predominantly French linguistic landscape further informs us about the dominant status of its francophone majority (Landry and Bourhis 1997). These two functions can be rephrased in terms of orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2003). That is, *linguistic landscape* first indexes ethnolinguistic groups and the boundaries of their territories, and then it indexes the relative power and social status that are attributed to these groups.
Similar indexical links that emanate from *linguistic landscape* to other social structures (e.g. power hierarchy) or processes (e.g. globalization) underlie the majority of existing research on linguistic landscape bearing the label *linguistic landscape*, albeit not always explicitly stated. As most previous studies were conducted by researchers interested in language policy and planning, particularly in multilingual societies, it is not surprising that, as noted by Landry and Bourhis (1997), Gorter (2006b) and Backhaus (2006), one of the central themes is the comparison between official (e.g. road signs, street names) versus unofficial signs (e.g. shop signs, advertisements, graffiti). It is frequently assumed that official signs are produced by governmental authorities, hence alternatively termed “top-down” in Ben-Rafael et al’s (2006) study of the linguistic landscape, and that unofficial signs are made by social actors in private sectors, hence “bottom-up” in the same study. These two types of sign have been observed to diverge in various ways. Most studies collected in Gorter (2006a) seem to agree that while official signs indicate authoritative power over language use, "most non-official signs, in contrast, do not express hierarchies of distinct languages but allow for intermingling of different codes for different purposes" (Backhaus 2006, 63). However, as Ben-Rafael et al (2006) also cautions us, variation across different types of signs in linguistic landscape cannot simply be reduced to power struggles, but should be explained by multiple intermingling.
Based on my own ethnographic research regarding the production of linguistic landscape in Washington, DC Chinatown, I think that the problem with this conceptualization lies deeper. The dichotomy between official and unofficial signs blurs the complexity involved in producing linguistic landscape (also critiqued in Malinowski 2009). I will return to this issue of authorship later when discussing how linguistic landscape can be re-conceptualized in order to benefit from sociolinguistic theories.

The second central theme in previous research is their focus on the spread of English as a global language and its relation to other regional and local linguistic varieties. Reporting from all over the world, from Israel (Ben-Rafael et al 2006) to Tokyo (Backhaus 2006), from Banaras, a northern Indian city (Ladousa 2002) to Bangkok (Huebner 2006), researchers have observed the increased use and visibility of the English language in the public space. In most cases, English signs do not usually index a local community of speakers of the language; the phenomenon has been interpreted “as a symbolic expression ... to join the English language community and to associate with the values that are typically attached to it (American/Western culture, internationalisation, etc.) (Backhaus 2006, 63), and thus is seen as a reflection of globalization in process (Gorter 2006c). Although this observation is to some extent applicable to countries and regions that have not been colonized by Anglophone countries in the past, such
as Thailand, the status of English as a global language is questionable in post-colonial regions, such as Hong Kong and India, let alone within the United States, Canada, or the United Kingdom. For example, Vaish (2005) has shown, through her ethnographic work in an underprivileged bilingual school in Delhi, that English could be used as local economic resource to empower the impoverished urban population. And even in regions that have had less colonial influence in the past such as in mainland China, it has been observed that elements of the English language are depleted of their original meanings and take on new functions in the stylization of local identities (Lou 2005). Indeed, as Hall (1990) points out, the current process of globalization “goes global and local in the same moment” (26-27). Therefore, whether English represents globalization or localization can only be answered through empirical research and from the perspectives of the local actors.

The final common characteristic shared by the majority of existing research on linguistic landscape is its use of digital photographs of signs as a research method. All of the articles collected in Gorter (2006a) involve quantitative analysis of signs collected using digital cameras. Despite the different sampling method and coding scheme that these studies employ, they share the goal of describing visible language use surrounding us in everyday life, which is a type of linguistic data that was not systematically studied before. In
addition, compared with spoken interaction, *linguistic landscape* as data also presents an advantage in its relatively longer social life, hence its easier traceability over time, and its avoidance of the observer’s paradox. In Spolsky’s (2008) words, “signs don’t walk away, or ask why you are observing them.” At the same time, he also points out that such descriptive methods limit this line of inquiry to the observation of *linguistic landscape* as a product, and do not suffice to answer the question of the process of its construction. True enough, many existing works have been constrained by the descriptive method to the speculation “that LL research may well be revealing of more general processes flowing through social settings” (Ben-Rafael *et al* 2006, 9). To counter this problem, a few researchers have started to expand the field by including other research methods, such as eliciting narratives about the making of signs during interviews (Malinowski 2009), and observing the use of a laboratory wall space over time (Hanauer 2009).

To summarize, in this section, I reviewed the rapidly growing and expanding body of works on *linguistic landscape*. Three main themes emerge in existing research, namely, 1) the indexical link from *linguistic landscape* to social structure (e.g. ethnolinguistic hierarchies) and process (e.g. globalization); 2) a comparison between English as a global language and the national or minority language as its local counterpart; 3) quantitative analysis of photographed signs.
I have also discussed some of the limitations corresponding to these themes, for example, the complexity in determining the authorship of the signs, the extent to which the author has control in the signification of the signs (Malinowski 2009), and the challenge in observing the social process behind *linguistic landscape* (Spolsky 2009).

However, before moving onto the next section, I would also like to stress the potential contributions that the study of *linguistic landscape* could make towards other areas of sociolinguistic research, especially the studies concerning the interaction between language and place. First of all, as already mentioned, *linguistic landscape* presents itself as a type of linguistic data that has not been sufficiently studied. It thus has the potential to offer an intermediate level of analysis that connects linguistic practices to socio-cultural structure and process, a long-term interest of sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists.

As reviewed in the preceding section in this chapter, although researchers on *linguistic landscape* have been successful in systematically describing its features and also drawing indexical links to other social structures and processes, the question of how *linguistic landscape* has changed the meaning of its containing spatial context is largely left unanswered (this shortcoming is also pointed by Malinowski 2008a, who further cites Leeman and Modan 2007’s critique).
Given the intricate etymological link of the word “landscape” with land, this study, I attempt to address the above-mentioned gap by examining the dialectical relationship between linguistic landscape, space, and place. While researchers have empirically or speculatively drawn indexical arrows from linguistic landscape to social factors, such as ethnolinguistic identity and globalization, few of these arrows point back at the immediate socio-spatial entity on which it is observed. Therefore, little is said about the role of linguistic landscape in the production and interpretation of place. It is the goal of the current study to bridge these two lines of research through an examination of how linguistic landscape is used as a key resource for the symbolic preservation and revitalization of Washington, DC Chinatown, which has gradually changed its meaning and identity. But in order to do so, I will first need to re-conceptualize linguistic landscape as text and semiotic-material artifact, and then situate it in its temporal and spatial contexts, because, as mentioned in the first section, in most existing research on the topic, descriptive method alone constrains the potential of linguistic landscape for illuminating the social process behind its construction (Spolsky 2009). Additionally, because of the tendency to oversimplify the complex roles of author and reader (also critiqued by Malinowski 2008, 2009), previous work has been less beneficial for our understanding of how language becomes simultaneously the product and tool of power.
RE-CONCEPTUALIZING LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

Recalling Landry and Bourhis’s definition of linguistic landscape as a collection of signs in a circumscribed public space, here the word “sign” refers to “a notice that is publicly displayed giving information or instructions in a written or symbolic form” as in “the stop sign” (New Oxford American Dictionary), and is not to be confused with sign (italicized to differentiate from the former) as the object of semiotics. In fact, as Leeman and Modan (cited in Malinowski 2008) point out, there is little discussion in the literature with regard to linguistic landscape itself. Although much attention was paid to the choices and arrangement of languages in the signs that compose linguistic landscape, precisely what kind of linguistic unit linguistic landscape is remains a question. There are three potential competing answers: sign (in the semiotic sense), text, or discourse. Each term carries its own scholarly tradition, and none is superior to any other in any sense. Therefore, in the current study, I will alternate among these three conceptual perspectives when appropriate.

First, I will compare these three terms by reviewing their definitions. Sign was defined by Saussure (1959) as the combination of the signifier (form) and the signified (content). It is the object of semiological analysis, which includes linguistics. Thus, language is seen as a system of linguistic signs. In fact, much of Saussure’s theory on sign was built upon analysis of sounds and their meanings.
Saussure advanced two principles regarding the nature of sign: 1) arbitrariness, and 2) linearity. By arbitrariness, he meant there was no natural connection between the signifier and the signified, which leads into the revolutionary insight that meaning is conventional, and thus language is inherently social (Saussure 1959; see also Hodge and Kress 1988 for comparison of Saussure’s insight with Voloshinov’s theories). Saussure’s second principle, linearity is only applicable to the verbal sign. Saussure also acknowledges that the singular, temporal dimension of the spoken sign is in sharp contrast to the multiple dimensions that the visual sign operates on. Given his structural orientation, it is not surprising that in the system of signs, there is little room for the process of meaning-making (Hodge and Kress 1988), which is the goal of the present study. In other words, Saussure’s theory did not seem to explain how the bond forms between a certain signified and a certain signifier. In addition, sign in this original conception seems to be largely unimodal. Although theoretically, a sign can be verbal or visual, this model does not allow the possibility of multimodality, a noticeable characteristic of linguistic landscape. Even when we look at a single letter on one shop sign, we can see multiple signs in operation. Just to name a few examples, its color could signify corporate identity, its lettering could signify a historical period, and its emplacement could signify the duration of its intended effect.
Therefore, to take the entire *linguistic landscape* as a *sign* would obscure the complexity in both its forms and meanings.

Now let’s turn to the other candidate *discourse*, probably the most polysemous term among the three (see Schiffrin 1994 for a comprehensive review of its reincarnations). In linguistics, *discourse* is usually defined as the level of language that is above and beyond *utterance*. In other disciplines of social sciences and humanities, *discourse* is largely conceived as “socially situated forms of knowledge about (aspects of) reality” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 21). Or in Gee’s (1999) words, this second meaning of *discourse* could refer to “language and ‘other stuff’ – ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, together with other people and with various sorts of characteristic objects, symbols, tools, and technologies” (7). Thus, he differentiates these two *discourses* by capitalizing the latter, called big “D” Discourse, and reserves the “little d” to refer to language-in-use. However, *linguistic landscape* does not seem to fit either definition. As a visual form of language that is spatially distributed, it is hard to think of it as consisting of sequentially ordered smaller units as in *discourse*. *Linguistic landscape* is certainly not just Discourse, either, because there are too many “other things” that it alone cannot account for. As Silverstein and Urban (1996) and Blommaert (2005) have cautioned us, language or text should not simply be equated with social structure or cultural process.
Considering linguistic landscape as text can compensate these limitations of sign and D/discourse. First of all, following Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) definition, text is not a structural unit, but a semantic one. Thus, it is not defined by mode or size - “A text may be spoken or written, prose or verse, dialogue or monologue. It may be anything from a single proverb to a whole play, from a momentary cry for help to an all-day discussion on a committee.” (1). In this definition, text could also be multimodal. For example, the text of a committee meeting usually involves both spoken interactions and written documents. Secondly, a piece of language becomes a text as soon as it is perceived as a unity. According to Halliday and Hasan, non-text is rare, as human beings are tremendously good at connecting disparate pieces of information together in order to make sense of them. Such perceived coherence is also noted by Ben-Rafael et al’s (2006) discussion of linguistic landscape: “the resulting chaotic character of LL... is most often perceived by passers-by as one structured space” (8). Moreover, in Landry and Bourhis (1997), linguistic landscape serves its informational function in marking ethnolinguistic boundaries, and thus is not only perceived as a unit but also prescribes boundaries for other units. Third, text, unlike sign, avoids being treated as a definable object (Barthes 1979), and thus provides a potential window into the process of its production and interpretation (Hodge and Kress 1988, Silverstein and Urban 1996, Fairclough 2003, Blommaert 2005). The textual
view thus makes it possible to reach a key objective of the current research project to investigate the process of producing linguistic landscape. Finally, text is open for divergent interpretations. In the words of Barthes (1979), “text is read without the father’s signature” (78). Hence, it assigns the reader a more active role in the collaborative meaning-making process. This dialogical nature of text resonates with David Malinowski’s (2009) observation that there often exists a discrepancy between the meaning intended by the producer of linguistic landscape and the interpretation of the observer.

I should note here that a textual approach to linguistic landscape is not new, although it has yet to have been explicitly stated. In Scollon and Scollon’s (1998) study of literate design (they did not use the term linguistic landscape, but “literate design” is a similar concept) in the public spaces of mainland China and Hong Kong, they compare features of literate designs to utterances in order to illuminate the multiple Discourses reflected in the signage. More recently, Garvin (2008) has referred to linguistic landscape as “visual public text.” And again, David Malinowski’s (2008) discussion regarding distributed authorship implies a textual view.

To summarize the discussion up to this point, viewing linguistic landscape as sign, discourse, or text has its advantages and disadvantages. In particular, reconceptualizing linguistic landscape as text has great potential for investigating
the social process of its production and interpretation, and the social relation
between its producers and interpreters. However, text is only a starting point. As
mentioned before, textual analysis itself provides only limited information about
social structure and process (Blommaert 2005; see also Fairlough’s 2003
acknowledgement of the limitation of textual analysis). Moreover, as text is
formulated by Halliday and Hasan as a semantic unit, “we do not, in fact,
evaluate any specimen of language – and deciding whether it does or does not
constitute text is a prerequisite to any further evaluations of it – without knowing
something about its context of situation” (20). Put simply, text does not exist
without context.

Therefore, in order to study linguistic landscape and its effect on the
meaning of place, it is necessary not only to view it as text but more importantly
to locate it in context. However, as volumes of scholarly discussions devoted to
context have shown, this is still a challenging task. The first challenge is the
potential infinity of context. Halliday and Hasan (1976) borrowed the terms
“context of situation” and “context of culture” from Bronislaw Malinowski to
distinguish two types of context, which is similar to Hodge and Kress’s (1988)
distinction between “immediate conditions of social interaction” and “social
organization of participants.” However, between, below, and beyond, these two
levels of contexts, there are many more “shapes and levels” (Blommaert 2005, 40;
see also Podesva and Chun 2007 for a proposal of multilayered context in determining the social meaning of a phonological variable). From this great variety of context follows the second challenge for the analyst: “How can one know precisely which contexts have influenced the speaker’s production and hearer’s interpretation of an utterance? In other words, how can analysts move from an ETIC list of the POSSIBLE contextual influences on language use to an EMIC understanding of the ACTUAL contextual influences on language use?” (Schiffrin 1987, 11, emphasis in original; see also Silverstein 1992 for the challenges posed by contextualization). While this is particularly challenging for the analysis of face-to-face spoken interaction due to the ephemeral nature of utterances, contextual influences seem to be more observable and traceable in the production and interpretation of linguistic landscape, a visible and relatively long-lasting form of language, which is also almost always a collective production.

However, it is not the goal of this study to provide an exhaustive account of contextual factors that contribute to the making and the sense-making of linguistic landscape, which is unattainable. Instead, I will synthesize a variety of analytical tools that have been developed by sociolinguists, linguistic anthropologists, and other analysts of social interactions, and apply them to the study of linguistic landscape. Further, on a theoretical level, I am intrigued to see how they will work with visual forms of language use, as most previous studies
have focused on verbal texts, whether spoken or written. Finally, the interdependence between text and context provides a nice parallel to the dialectics between language and place, discussed earlier in this chapter. As a heuristic guide, these analytical tools are organized on two dimensions of context: time and space.

**Situating Linguistic Landscape in Time**

Shields (1996) notes that there is “a paradigm shift within cultural studies and sociology from the analysis of objects to processes” (quoted in Jensen 2006, 145). This movement resonates with the emergence of a number of theoretical approaches that emphasize the need to study the meaning of language as situated in socio-cultural processes in the studies of language and communication. In linguistic anthropology, Silverstein, Urban and colleagues (Silverstein and Urban 1996) have advanced the notion of "entextualization", referring to the process whereby a text is taken out of its original context of occurrence and then re-embedded in a new one. Thus, entextualization is simultaneously recontextualization. Closely related is the term "resemiotization" coined by Iedema (2003), to complement the rather flat, synchronic characteristic of the concept of "multimodality." While research on multimodality tends to address the interaction among multiple semiotic modes in one text,
resemiotization investigates how a text is transformed from one mode to another. For example, in Iedema's longitudinal study of organizational communication in a health facility, he traces the trajectory of how spoken interactions at a meeting were crystallized into written documents, which were eventually realized in the spatial reconfiguration of the hospital. The concept of “resemiotization” calls our attention to the change in the material form of text, which is largely absent from studies of “entextualization,” which focuses on the discursive and metamorphic plane of meaning (i.e. content). Finally, “discourse cycle” is a concept proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2004), which is similar to the previously two but with a significant broader analytical scope. It involves not only tracing the trajectory of text, but also the trajectory of individual social actor (i.e. historical body or “habitus” in Bourdieu’s term) as well as the trajectory of each material resource (or, “mediational means” in Scollon 2001). All these trajectories form discourse cycles, which circulate through a particular moment of social interaction.

As entextualization, resemiotization and discourse cycles are complementary rather than mutually exclusive, any of them could prove to be most suitable term at different points in the analysis. However, I will focus on the “entextualization” and “resemiotization” of the linguistic landscape in Chinatown, which could potentially contribute to a more comprehensive “nexus analysis” (Scollon and Scollon 2004) of all cycles of discourse involved in the process.
Synthesizing discussions in the above-mentioned approaches to meaning-in-process, the following points seem especially relevant to *linguistic landscape* in its temporal contexts.

*Production Formats*

As mentioned earlier, one characteristic of linguistic landscape is the variety of organizations, groups, and individuals involved in its production (Ben-Rafael *et al.* 2006; Ben-Rafael 2009; Malinowski 2009). While such complicated authorship is more visible in written language displayed in public space, it has also been observed and teased apart in the production of individual utterance in face-to-face, spoken interaction, most of which was inspired by Goffman’s (1981) decomposition of the commonly assumed categories of “speaker” and “hearer.” Within “hearer,” he differentiates different modes of participation; within “speaker,” he separates layers of “production format.” In so doing, Goffman illuminates the laminated nature of talk (see also his work on *frames*, Goffman 1974), particularly in terms of overlapping and intersecting modes of participation. It is the discussion of “production format” that I find especially helpful and relevant in thinking about the multitude of social actors contributing to the linguistics, semiotic, and material form of linguistic landscape.
Goffman’s “production format” includes the “ animator,” who is “the talking machine, a body engaged in acoustic activity;” the “author,” referring to “someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded;” and the “principal,” “someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say” (1981, 144). He further observes that in ordinary talk, these roles are frequently laminated within the notion of “speaker,” whereas it is easier to differentiate them in institutional settings. For example, the President can be seen as an “animator” of a speech “authored” by a group of speechwriters, with, say, national interest, as the “principal” behind the words. As Goffman notes, the “principal” is usually not an individual, but “some socially based sources of self-identification,” an explicit or implicit “we” (145). Therefore, production format also has the potential of illuminating the role of social and cultural institutions in the production of text.

His insights have been extensively applied to the analysis of conversations and narratives, especially through close examination of pronominal references (e.g. Schiffrin 2006). Applying “production format”, which was developed based on observation of face-to-face spoken interactions, to the study of linguistic landscape, however, presents methodological challenges. While in talk, analysts are usually able to identify at least the basic biographic information of the
“speaker,” however complicated it may be revealed to be later, the producers of linguistic landscape are not directly identifiable at the same time as one looks at the product. In other words, the phase of production is rather removed from the phase of perception, and of course further removed from the time of the analysis. This is also a challenge for researchers of media discourse. Both Scollon (1998) and Cotter (2006), for example, have argued that it is necessary to conduct ethnographic observations on the backstage of media discourse production, for example, meetings of the editorial board, to uncover the different kinds of producers and their motives in the production of certain discourses.

The second challenge that we face in analyzing the trajectory of linguistic landscape is also an advantage. The process of its production usually happens on a much larger time scale than a strip of face-to-face interaction, and thus allows us to observe each stage of linguistic production, as it happens in order to discern social factors that are less discernable in spoken interactions. However, this also entails that the process involve additional kinds of producers, who might not neatly fit into Goffman’s “production format.” It seems necessary to import other kinds of production formats to complement those mentioned earlier. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) propose the following stages of multimodal discourse production:
• “Design” referring to “conceptualizations of the form of semiotic products and events” (21). To use their example of the music industry, a songwriter engages in the “design” of an album.

• “Production” referring to “the articulation in material form of semiotic products or events” (ibid.). This is the collective work of singers, music players, and sound engineers.

• “Distribution” referring to “the technical ‘re-coding’ of semiotic products and events, for purposes of recording and/or distribution” (ibid.). This is job of the producer and marketing professionals.

Drawing from this framework, we can thus add the roles of “designer,” “producer” and “distributor” to Goffman’s “production format,” in order to achieve a comprehensive picture of linguistic landscape’s production process.

Finally, as Goffman has also noted, there are circumstances wherein human speakers will have to share production with inanimate communication technologies, such as “loudspeaker system or telephone” (1981, 144). This observation is especially relevant to the production of linguistic landscape, and, in fact, any form or written language. When we write, we will need tools other than parts of our human body (termed “mediational means” in Scollon 2001), for example, pencil, paper, ink, typewriter, and computer. And making a shop sign will involve more tools like this, such as a commercial printer, which, of course
requires the investment of more resources and additional production formats. This brings us to the next point that the temporal situation of linguistic landscape has the potential to illuminate.

*Linguistic and Material Resources*

As Blommaert (2005) points out, there are several aspects of context which tend to be “forgotten” in existing sociolinguistic research. The first of these are *resources*, which he defines as “the complex of linguistic means and communicative skills” (58). It is essential to examine resources and their distribution, because “there is no conversation analysis possible when people don’t converse because they do not share resources” (61). Knowledge and communicative competence of language(s) are also a kind of resource in the production of linguistic landscape. To produce a bilingual sign in English and French, for example, entails the knowledge of both languages at least on the part of the “author” of the sign.

It is important to note here that different kinds of producers of linguistic landscape are likely to invest different kinds of resources into its making, and these resources probably go beyond linguistic ones as identified by Blommaert. For example, someone has to pay for the sign production; some other party contributes their computer skills and design expertise; and some others will need
to be willing to put up the signs in available spaces. As Iedema (2001) observes, “rematerialization requires new resource investments; restructuring derives from different expertises and literacies” (47-48).

Moreover, Blommaert reminds us that the distribution of resources in societies is not equal, and thus provides a direct link between the study of language to social structure and hierarchy. Plainly speaking, making a shop sign costs money, which is not affordable by just any individual. Further, not all resources are attached to the same economic and/or ideological value. For instance, bi-literacy alone, without financial investment, is not enough for putting up a sign. However, with money, one can pay someone else to make a bilingual sign, without having to know both languages. Again, to identify the different kinds of linguistic, economic, and political resources, we will need to situate linguistic landscape in its temporal context.

**Emergence of Cultural Categories**

Finally, tracing the trajectory of linguistic landscape also provides us with a window into the emergence of cultural categories. Silverstein and Urban (1996) argue that investigating the history of text enables us to see how a certain social category is projected. Although the categories discussed in their edited volume are mostly related to certain social roles or authorities, such as the shaman in
Hanks (1996), this is equally applicable to the emergence of other cultural categories, for example, Received Pronunciation as studied by Agha (2003). Similarly, instead of taking Chinatown as a presumed category of place, I ask how such category has emerged and is transformed (Ball 2007, personal communication). Studying the trajectory of the linguistic landscape of Chinatown provides one angle for answering this question. In this way, we also have an empirical approach to investigate the dialectics between language and place.

**Situating Linguistic Landscape in Space**

As discussed earlier in the chapter, despite linguistic landscape's intricate etymological link with geography, it is often decontextualised from its spatial environment. This is so probably because linguistic landscape itself tends to be conceived as the context, the background, or even "the décor of public life" (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006, 10). Of course, as Goodwin and Duranti (1992) have postulated, what constitutes *text* and what constitutes *context* depend on the focus of the observer. If we focus on pedestrian interactions in a certain space, then linguistic landscape could be considered as the context; if we shift the focal point to linguistic landscape, then pedestrian traffic becomes part of its context. It is thus less important to determine whether linguistic landscape is text or context than it
is to acknowledge that, as any other form of language use, it does not exist in isolation, and therefore should be contextualized spatially as well as temporally.

There is a long tradition of research on the complex relationship between language and space. Some emphasize the important role that language plays in denoting, reframing, and perceiving space (see a review of research from such perspective in Keating 2000). Others emphasize how spatial analysis has contributed to our understanding of language and interaction (see Collins 2005). However, neither spatial nor linguistic determinism is sufficient in describing the complex interactions between these two phenomena. As both Keating and Collins have noted, scholars have been increasingly aware of the dialectic between language and space (see also discussion with regards to language and place earlier in the chapter).

Interaction between linguistic landscape and other forms of language use in the same geographic area did, however, receive some attention in earlier research. For example, in Landry and Bourhis’s seminal article (1997), they observe that the discrepancy between the language of public signs and the language of services in a local area could generate frustration and a feeling that one’s in-group language is not respected. Conversely, they propose that “the systematic use of the in-group language on public signs may result in a carryover effect that can contribute to the emergence or maintenance of a sociolinguistic
norm favoring greater use of in-group language in an increasing range of language functions extending from private to more public domains of language use” (Landry and Bourhis 1997, 29). However, their observation and hypothesis about the interactive effect that linguistic landscape has on other forms of language use were largely unaddressed in the studies following them. It is not until recently that researchers have started to expand the paradigm by embedding linguistic landscape in what is called "the ecology of language" (Hult 2009, Shohamy and Waksman 2009).

In the framework proposed for the current study, I pursue a similar objective by borrowing established conceptual tools of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology to analyze the temporal and spatial contexts of linguistic landscape. In the previous section, concepts such as entextualization, resemiotization, production formats, and resources were introduced to address the temporal dimension. In this section, I will turn to address the spatial context of linguistic landscape.

**Semiotic Aggregates**

As discussed earlier, place is more than a container of human activities. Rather, the meaning of place is construed through all kinds of semiotic interactions between human beings and their spatial environments (Johnstone
Scollon and Scollon’s book *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* (2003) provides a useful framework for conceptualizing these interactions in terms of three main semiotic systems – “interaction order,” “visual semiotics,” and “place semiotics.” Together they constitute what Scollon and Scollon have termed the “semiotic aggregate,” defined as “multiple semiotic systems in a dialogical interaction with each other” (12). In line with their interest “in the ways language or discourse is part of this perennial weave of individuals, objects, time, and space” (14), I consider *linguistic landscape* as the visual semiotic component of the *semiotic aggregate* of a place.

I will now present a modified outline of Scollon and Scollon’s geosemotic framework (2003, 20-21), with the content of each component semiotic system slightly rearranged. The first semiotic system in the framework is *interaction order*, a term borrowed from Goffman (1983) but also intended 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” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 16). For example, in a coffee shop, we can observe many different types of *interaction order*. There is the *line* or *queue* either running parallel or perpendicular to the cashier; there is, of course, the *service encounter* between the customer and the cashier; there is the *with*, two or more people engaged in interactions with a
common focal point; there is the *single*, an individual appearing to not interact with anyone else, for example, reading a newspaper; then, when there is anyone with a markedly loud voice or making unusual comments, everyone’s attention temporarily shifts towards this person, who in Goffman’s words, would have staged a *platform event*, however fleeting. As Scollon and Scollon have reminded us, it is important to recognize *interaction orders* also as semiotic signs, which “give off” (Goffman 1959) social information about social actors. In addition to these “units of interaction order,” under *interaction order*, Scollon and Scollon also include the five types of perceptual spaces developed by Edward T. Hall (1966).

Because different sensory perceptions of a place also imbue it with meaning, my preference is to move them to the system of *place semiotics*, which will be discussed shortly.

The second component system in the geosemiotic framework is *visual semiotics*, referring to “the ways in which pictures (signs, images, graphics, texts, photographs, paintings, and all of the other combinations of these and others) are produced as meaningful wholes for visual interpretation” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 8). Here they opt for a narrower definition of the term as used in Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). A broader definition of *visual semiotics* includes “all of the ways in which meaning is structured within our visual fields” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 11), which would significantly overlap with the other two
component systems, as interaction order and place semiotics are also perceived visually. While I follow the narrower definition, I would also like to expand it slightly to include other visual characteristics of signs, such as code preference, inscription, and emplacement, which were part of place semiotics in Scollon and Scollon’s original framework (see their outline on page 20-21), as I believe they are more a part of the visual image of Chinatown than its material space.

As the third system of geosemiotics, place semiotics is coined by the Scollons as an effort to connect studies in fields such as urban planning and cultural geography to the studies of micro-level social interaction and language use. Therefore, place semiotics is concerned with the meaning system of spatial organization, or inversely defined as “the huge aggregation of semiotic systems which are not located in the persons of the social actors or in the framed artifacts of visual semiotics” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 8). Place semiotics includes things such as a typology of spaces according to their uses, for example, fronstage versus backstage, private versus public, display space versus passage space. As mentioned in relation to interaction order, I would also include Hall’s typology of spaces according to the five kinds of sensory perceptions under place semiotics. Hence, a modified outline of geosemiotics and its component systems is presented in Table 2.1 below.
### Geosemiotics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Order:</th>
<th>Visual Semiotics:</th>
<th>Place Semiotics:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interpersonal distance (intimate, personal, social, public)</td>
<td>1. Pictures (Represented participants modality, composition, interactive participants)</td>
<td>1. Perceptual spaces (moved from interaction order): visual, auditory, olfactory, thermal, haptic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal front (appearance, behavior)</td>
<td>2. Material aspects of visual semiotics (moved from place semiotics): code preference, inscription, emplacement</td>
<td>2. Use spaces: frontage or public (exhibit/display, passage, special use, secure), backstage or private, regulatory spaces (vehicle traffic, pedestrian traffic, public notice), commercial space (e.g. holiday market), transgressive space (e.g. homeless hangouts).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Units of interaction order (single, with, file or procession, queue, contact, service encounter, conversational encounter, meeting, people-processing encounter (interview, screening, examination), platform event, celebrative occasion)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Modified outline of geosemiotic framework based on Scollon & Scollon (2003, 20-21)

To recapitulate, geosemiotics is the study of semiotic aggregates, which are composed of three main semiotic systems -- interaction order, visual semiotics and place semiotics -- in dialogical interaction with each other. In the subsequent sections, I borrow the notions of flow/network and scale to show how semiotic aggregates can be multiplied both horizontally and vertically to connect places that are not necessarily observable within the same spatial frame.
Flow and Polycentric Neighborhoods

While the geosemiotic framework is useful for teasing apart the complex interactions among multiple semiotic systems constituting a place, it alone does not suffice to explain such phenomena as watching the simultaneous broadcasting of a basketball game taking place in a sports arena while sitting in a student lounge, or talking about the U.S. presidential campaign while having dinner in a neighborhood pizza joint. To address these questions, it seems necessary to combine the geosemiotic framework with the notions of flow and scale.

As reviewed in Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2005b) and Jensen (2006), flows and networks are central concepts that have emerged in the studies of globalization, which emphasize the connection between (and the movement across spaces). Many attribute the origin of the term flow to Deleuze and Guatarri’s essay City/State (1986), in which they compare the social structure of the “town” with that of the “state.” They contend that, while “state” is hierarchically ordered, “town” is organized horizontally.

The town is the correlate of the road. The town exists only as a function of circulation and of circuits; it is a singular point on the circuits which create it and which it creates. It is defined by entries and exits: something must enter it and exit from it. It imposes a frequency. It effects a
polarization of matter, inert, living or human; it causes the phylum, the 
flow, to pass through specific places, along horizontal lines (195-196, 
emphasis added).

This idea of flow becomes a prominent theme in later studies of the contemporary 
city. Jensen (2006, 144) summarizes key assumptions:

First of all, the contemporary city is one characterized by increased flow of 
people, symbols, and material goods. Second, the contemporary city is linked 
to multiple global-local networks of such flows. Third, as the intensity and 
number of connections are on the rise, this is a situation of ‘accelerating 
mobility’ in the city.

One application of flow is Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck’s (2005a) study of 
an urban immigrant neighborhood in Ghent, Belgium, wherein they propose the 
term polycentricity to characterize the neighborhood as consisting of multiple 
centers (e.g. schools, mosque, public health centers, streets), each of which also 
serves multiple functions.

Spatial Scales

The notion of flow has helped to expand geosemiotic framework 
horizontally. Now I turn to the discussion of scale and consider how it can add a 
vertical dimension to the picture. Spatial scale is introduced by Blommaert, 
Collins and Slembrouck (2005b) to complement flow in globalization theory,
which often assumes the neutrality of movement across spaces. Instead, they suggest, “it is good to remember that flows do not develop in empty spaces, they are movements across spaces filled with all kinds of attributes and features, both materially and symbolically (202). They define scale as:

the idea that spaces are ordered and organized in relation to one another, stratified and layered, with processes belonging to one scale entering processes at another scale – as when skin color, social class backgrounds or a particular regional (‘peripheral’) accent started influencing situated interactions (Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz and Roberts, 1991; Hall and Slembrouck, 2001), when media reporting starts influencing how people actually talk about their life, or when everyday experience starts feeding into media reporting and policy (Blommaert et al., 2003, 203). 

Harking back to one of the two vignettes described previously, we could see the face-to-face conversation at a local pizza restaurant as one semiotic aggregate, the neighborhood as another semiotic aggregate on a higher-level spatial scale, then the city, and finally the national scale on which the presidential campaign is performed.

So far we have considered the situation of linguistic landscape in both its temporal and spatial contexts. As hinted at earlier, time and space are heuristic notions. In other words, while they help us to conceptually organize the myriad facets of context that shape and are shaped by linguistic landscape, in practice,
however, it is impossible to separate them, as any semiotic artifact exists in a specific locale and at a specific time.

**Summary and Research Questions**

To summarize, borrowing a range of analytical tools from sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, I have proposed a theoretical framework in which *linguistic landscape* is regarded as *text* situated in temporal and spatial contexts. The purpose of doing so is to illuminate the complex dialogical interactions among language, discourse, space, and place, through the study of a level of language use that has yet to be fully investigated, namely, *linguistic landscape* as the material and visual representation of languages in public space. Applying this framework to the linguistic landscape of Washington, DC Chinatown, this general goal is operationalized in terms of the following research questions:

1. First, how do we describe *linguistic landscape*? In other words, what are the linguistic, visual and material characteristics of *linguistic landscape* of Washington, DC Chinatown?

2. Second, situating *linguistic landscape* in time, what are the production formats, linguistic and material resources involved in its production? What kinds of socio-cultural categories emerge during this process?
3. Third, situating *linguistic landscape* in space, how do we characterize Chinatown as a geosemiotic aggregate? What are some of the prominent types of interaction orders and place semiotics? How do they interact with *linguistic landscape*? How does linguistic landscape interact with other semiotic aggregates materially and discursively linked with DC Chinatown?

In the following chapter, I propose a methodological framework to answer these questions.
Like most Chinatowns in North America, Washington, DC Chinatown is located in the urban center (see Figure 3.1 below). Such central location presents Chinatown as a unique site of research due to its proximity to major tourist destinations and government buildings, its location within the core area of urban revitalization, and its function as one of the main public transportation hubs in the District. This urban setting also presents several methodological challenges and calls for an integrative research design as well as constant introspection with regards to the multiple roles that I as researcher take up in relation to the neighborhood and people living and working there. In this chapter, I will first delineate the geographic setting and historical background of Chinatown in Washington, DC, and then discuss the range of research methods that I have employed to conduct the study.
Figure 3.1: The central location of Chinatown in Washington, DC (NeighborhoodInfo DC 2008)

THE GEOGRAPHIC SETTING OF WASHINGTON, DC CHINATOWN

The present study is conducted mostly in Washington, DC Chinatown, located in the northeast part of Northwest Washington, DC. Its official boundary, according to the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study (AEPA 1989), consists of Massachusetts Avenue and K Street to the north, G Street to the south, 8th Street to the west, and 5th Street to the east (Figure 3.2).
Figure 3.2: Official boundary of Chinatown (Google Maps 2009; AEPA 1989)

Chinatown in DC is about one mile from the White House and 1.2 miles from the US Capitol. The District’s Convention Center is only one block from its western boundary line (8th Street). Bordering its south boundary (G Street), there are Verizon Center, a 20,000 seat sports and entertainment arena on the east side of 7th street and National Portrait Gallery on the west side of the street. Walking south on 7th street for 10 minutes, you will reach the National Archives, the National Gallery of Art and many other museums and galleries on the National Mall. On your way there, you will also pass by the Spy Museum and the newly opened Museum of Crime and Punishment. The National Building Museum is located just to the west of Chinatown on F Street NW. In addition to its proximity
to popular tourist destinations, Figure 3.3 also shows the large number of federal and municipal government buildings located in and around the Chinatown area. As may be seen in Figure 3.3 below, half of the Chinatown area itself is also covered by the Historical District, with two buildings (the Mary Surratt House and 700 5th Street) established as Historic Landmarks (AEPA 1989).

![Figure 3.3: Chinatown in relation to tourist destinations and landmarks (Google Maps 2009)](image)

In addition, Chinatown is a hub for intra- and inter-city transportation. The Gallery Place-Chinatown metro station is one of the four stations in the subway system where three subway lines (Red, Blue, and Yellow) connect. On the Red Line, Chinatown is only two stops away from Union Station (railway)
and the Greyhound bus depot. In addition, four long distance coach companies (commonly known as the “Chinatown buses”) pick up passengers in Chinatown for inexpensive rides to Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia.

Construction cranes are another familiar part of Chinatown’s landscape. Together with other neighborhoods in the same neighborhood cluster 8, including Downtown to the west, Mount Vernon Square to the north, Penn Quarters to the south, and North Capitol Street to the west (Figure 3.4), Chinatown is part of the urban “core” of the District that has undergone intensified urban development projects since the 1970s. These have led to the recent demographic change and marked a new historical era for Chinatown (Lee, Spain, and Umberson 1985; Tatian et al. 2008).

Figure 3.4: Chinatown is part of a dramatically changed Neighborhood Cluster 8

(NeighborhoodInfo DC 2008; Tatian et al. 2008)
A BRIEF HISTORY AND RECENT CHANGE IN DEMOGRAPHY

The current site of Washington, DC Chinatown as described above is, however, its second home. According to historical records (Lim 1991; Chow 1996; Hathaway & Ho 2003), after the first Chinese resident of DC, Chiang Kai, settled down in 1851, the original Chinatown took shape on Pennsylvania Avenue near Fourth Street and One-Half Street, NW (now John Marshall Place), including about two grocers, 27 laundries, and 100 Chinese inhabitants, mostly men. By 1908, as its population grew to 400, Chinatown expanded to 3rd and 6th Streets NW. More drugstores, restaurants, and tailor shops opened by 1903.

However, in 1927, the Federal Triangle project ordered Chinatown to be moved from Pennsylvania Avenue. Led by On Leong Merchants Association, Chinatown relocated to H Street NW, between 6th and 7th Streets. Despite strong opposition from the area’s white residents and businesses at that time, the Chinese community took root in this new site. In 1928, the population grew back to about 600, including men, women, and children, increasing to about 800, including 32 families and 34 students, by 1936. By then, there were also 145 Chinese-owned laundries, 62 restaurants, and 12 stores in Chinatown and throughout DC. In addition, eight community organizations, including men’s lodges and a Chinese community church were founded in Chinatown by 1939.
The 1965 Immigration Act resulted in a sharp increase in immigration and at the same time created new patterns of settlement. By 1966, little more than 10% of the 3,000 Chinese Americans living in Washington, DC were affected. Furthermore, businesses in Chinatown, as were the commercial activities in the rest of downtown DC by the 1968 riots. By 1970, reports indicated that only 481 Chinese lived in Chinatown.

In 1972, a proposal was made to build the DC Convention Center at 7th and H Streets. Facing the threat of a second displacement in fewer than 50 years, Chinatown residents successfully petitioned to move the site of the proposed Convention Center to 9th and H Streets, NW. The construction of Wah Luck House on 6th Street, an apartment building for low-income and elderly residents (with priority for those displaced by the Conventional Center project), began in 1975 and was completed in 1982. In 1986, the Friendship Archway, the largest single-span archway in the world, was built at the intersection of H and 7th Streets. At its peak, government officials estimate that there were about 1,000 Chinese residents in Chinatown.

Since the MCI Center (now Verizon Center) and the new Convention Center opened their doors in 1997, Chinatown has increasingly become a magnet for commercial developers, which has consequently driven up the real estate value of the area and made it increasingly unaffordable to own or rent for small
business owners. As of 2008, there are only about 22 restaurants owned by Chinese and Asian Americans. In 1990, 66% of the population in Census Tract 58, which includes Chinatown, was Asian and Pacific Islanders, and it dropped to 40% in 2000. The current estimated number of Chinese residents in Chinatown, according to the Mayor’s Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, is around 250. Most of these residents are elders and newly arrived immigrants with limited English proficiency, living in the 153 units of Wah Luck House, 90% of which are one-bedroom apartments.

The number of community organizations has also decreased over the years. Whereas there were 12 community organizations in 1991, there are currently only five active ones, including the oldest community organization – the Chinese Community Church Service Center, which was founded in 1935. I have chosen the relatively new Chinatown Community Cultural Center (CCCC) as my anchor in the neighborhood, especially for the ethnographic component of my research. The founders and staff of CCCC largely overlap with the Chinatown Steering Committee (CSC), which oversees the implementation of the Chinatown Design Guidelines, and also because CCCC serves as the office and meeting place for CSC along with many other community meetings and events.

In contrast to the dwindling number of Chinese, Asian, and Pacific Islanders residents in the neighborhood, the white, non-Hispanic population of
Census Tract 8 increased from 13% in 1990 to 41% in 2000 (NeighborhoodInfo DC 2008). As the many new condominium developments have contributed to the increased racial and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood’s demographic composition, and its Chinese and non-Chinese restaurants have become a giant “kitchen” for office workers and tourists, this urban research setting presented several methodological challenges, especially regarding whom I was studying, whose perspectives on linguistic landscape I was researching, and how I could understand these perspectives through the study of language and discourse.

**STUDY DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS**

Not including pre-dissertation research on DC Chinatown’s shop signs in February 2004 and November 2005 (published in Lou 2007), main research activities for this dissertation project took place in a time frame of 18 months, divided into the following three stages:

1. **February to May 2007**: I conducted pilot ethnographic fieldwork, made key contacts, worked to establish a role for myself in the community mainly through volunteer activities at Chinatown Community Culture Center. In this time period I also conducted five interviews;

2. **September to October 2007**: Having narrowed down research focus to linguistic landscape over the summer while at home in Shanghai, I
returned to Chinatown and CCCC to continue open-ended participant observation and interviews. Meanwhile, I re-photographed all shop signs in Chinatown more systematically and conducted a quantitative analysis as a component of the present project;

3. November 2007 to November 2008: After a community organizer informed me about the meetings during which shop sign designs were discussed, the focus of observation shifted to these meetings, which were recorded in both video and audio recordings and ethnographic fieldnotes. At the same time, I also conducted structured observations of different sites of interaction in the neighborhood with the aid of a digital camera and conducted more interviews.

Throughout above phases of the project, a research design that combines a variety of research methods has been employed in order to achieve a well-rounded understanding of how various forms of language and discourse contribute to the place-making process in Chinatown. In the following pages of this section, I will first state the motivation for such integrative design, then describe how I used each research method in data collection and analysis, and discuss how their strengths and weaknesses complement each other.
An Integrative Research Design

In his proposal of a linguistic research agenda most likely to obtain a “correct” understanding of the vernacular, Labov (1972) argues that, “intersubjective agreement is best reached by convergence of several kinds of data with complementary sources of errors” (97). Although the focus of this research project is on linguistic landscape, which by its definition as the aggregate of visual language on the surface of a certain geographic area, constitutes a very different kind of linguistic data from Labov’s vernacular in terms of both semiotic mode (visual vs. oral) and material form (materially inscribed vs. spontaneously uttered), this principle of convergence of methods and data is still applicable.

Meanwhile, different types of data in and of themselves do not automatically guarantee the achievement of intersubjective understanding, which can be more accurately expressed as the convergence of multiple perspectives on the same linguistic and communicative phenomena. As suggested by Ruesch and Bateson (1968) and recapitulated in Scollon and Scollon (2004, 158), well-triangulated data should represent the following four aspects:

- **Members’ generalization:** What do participants say they do (normatively)? This is often at variance both with objective observation and with that member’s own individual experience.
• **Neutral (objective) observations**: What does a neutral observer see? Often at variance with the generalizations made about the group or the self.

• **Individual experience**: What does an individual describe as his or her experience? Often characterized as being different from one’s own group.

• **Interactions with members**: How do participants account for your analysis? This will mostly focus on the resolution of contradictions among the first three types of data.

If I look at Chinatown’s **linguistic landscape** by myself alone, even though the data were collected from the “secular world” in Labov’s words, my interpretation of its meaning is still a researcher’s reading of it, representing so-called “neutral” observations. But how similar and different are these from the interpretation of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape by non-linguists residents, community leaders, business owners, office workers, tourists, and pedestrians? In order to fully incorporate these perspectives, it was essential to combine different research methods and gather different types of data.

As I have discussed in more details in Chapter 1 and 2, in comparison with speech data, linguistic landscape, as a kind of visual and material linguistic data, has its own underlying principles of structure and presentation, a much longer process of production, and a complex collective participant framework and contributes to the identity of a place more directly by being physically and
relatively more permanently inscribed on its surface. Therefore, it seems rather evident that in order to answer the research questions listed at the end of Chapter 2 well, it is necessary to adopt different research methods, borrowed from various social scientific fields and subfields, such as multilingualism approaches to linguistic landscape, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, linguistic anthropology, as well as visual anthropology and urban studies.

For example, in order to conduct a systematic comparative analysis of the shop signs of Chinese and non-Chinese stores, I first needed to photograph all the signs. To understand the various historical processes about Chinatown, I needed to interview community leaders involved in policy making, and observe with my own eyes as well as video record community meetings discussing whether or not to approve a shop sign design. Finally, in order to understand how linguistic landscape interacts with other aspects of place (namely material space and spatial practice) in the making of Chinatown, I needed to observe and participate in activities taking place on in the streets, in restaurants, in community centers, and other sites of interaction. In the following sections, I will describe each of the main research methods in more details, discussing their advantages and limitations, and also summarizing the type and quantity of data collected with each method.
Photographing Shop Signs and Beyond

Photography has been one of the main and first research methods that I have employed in a geosemiotic and ethnographic analysis of linguistic landscape in this research project. In addition to accurately recording the nuanced forms of shop signs, photographs of shop signs can be digitally mapped onto a cartographic map of Chinatown. In addition, I have used a pocket-sized digital camera to capture fleeting interaction order and spatial practice. In some cases, the camera has even inadvertently helped me establish a tourist’s front while wandering in the streets of Chinatown, thus gaining invaluable ethnographic insights.

Although photography is not a common research method in linguistics, given the visual nature of linguistic landscape, it was surprising to find no photographs in Landry and Bourhis’s seminal article (1997) on the subject. However, photography, especially, digital photography, has become an essential means to collect and analyze data in more recent research on this subject (see, for example, the collection of articles in Gorter 2006 and Shohamy and Gorter 2009). Photography is even more indispensable for a close geosemiotic analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2003), which takes into consideration many factors in addition to language varieties, including color, typeface, layout, and physical installment. Although it is theoretically possible to code data in the field, the availability of
digital photography significantly reduced the amount of time that I needed to spend in the neighborhood to a few hours for each shooting trip. More importantly, when re-examined, photographs might show details not previously noticed, owing to the fact that digital photographs can also be easily enlarged and zoomed into on the computer screen for closer examinations. In these ways, the camera is as indispensable to the study of linguistic landscape as the tape recorder to the observation of spoken language (Labov 1972). During the pre-dissertation stage, I made two shooting trips in Washington, DC Chinatown, producing a total of 142 pictures, 99 of which were of shop signs. In October 2007, about five months into dissertation fieldwork, I re-photographed all shop signs in Chinatown more systematically. Based on 140 photos of shop signs from this single trip, I then conducted a quantitative analysis of an exhaustive sample of 90 stores’ signs. Issues of sampling and coding are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. In the following 12 months of fieldwork, I have continued to carry the digital camera with me, adding new or changed shop signs. A summary of photographic data is presented in Table 3.1 below.

It is important to note here that there is significant overlap in these photos, for example, shots of the same shop sign from multiple angles at different times of the day. For this reason, these photos in themselves do not constitute units for any quantitative analysis and are mainly used for ethnographic purposes.
Table 3.1: Summary of photographic data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shop Signs</th>
<th>Others (e.g. spatial practice, streets, buildings, etc.)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-dissertation (February 2004 &amp; November 2005)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Research (March 2007 to November 2008)</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>1338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>1158</td>
<td>1480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With its more holistic vision, the camera is also well-suited for the study of the spatial environment, especially as a tool of orientation and survey of a geographic area. As Collier and Collier (1986) have argued, “an observer’s capacity for rounded vision is certainly related to the degree of involvement with environment” (5); conversely, the more rounded vision provided by the camera increases the spatial scope of my own observation. While visual anthropologists have traditionally relied on aerial photos and long-angle shots and pinned photos onto wall-sized maps to produce an overview (Collier and Collier 1986), current digital technology makes it possible to produce a photographic survey on the desktop. From the total of 423 shop sign photos, I selected a representative
photo for each store, mapping it on to a representation of the streets of Chinatown using the free “My Maps” service provided by Google.

The portable digital camera has also helped me capture rather fleeting spatial practices and interaction orders for further analysis. For example, a photograph can capture several groups of tourists taking photos of the Archway at the intersection of 7th and H Streets, while ethnographic field notes would have to describe their simultaneous behaviors in temporal sequence. A photo of the seating arrangement of more than 10 participants at a community meeting also allowed me to participate more fully in observation rather than drawing figures and trying to identify everyone in the notebook.

Additionally, although unanticipated, I have noticed that during fieldwork, the camera could also function as “sign equipment,” to use Goffman’s terminology (Goffman 1959), establishing a tourist or visitor “front” for myself. The abundance of tourists on the streets of Chinatown made my carrying a camera around and shooting at almost anything a rather inconspicuous act. Furthermore, by performing the very act of lifting up the camera (whether below the archway or during a lion dance performance), I could reach closer to the perspective of a tourist and visitor on Chinatown, one of the goals of my ethnographic fieldwork.
Finally, as Collier and Collier (1986) note, photography is not only a faithful recorder of social life and cultural reality, but it can also be employed as an ethnographic tool to establish rapport with the community. When visiting elderly residents in Wah Luck House, I took pictures of them in the landscaped garden and in their apartment. On the following New Year, I gave these framed prints as holiday presents. Several times, community organizers asked me to send them pictures of community events to keep as organizational records. Once, when I showed a few community members some old photos that I have found in a book with limited circulation (Lim 1991), a few community members were thrilled to find people they knew in those old photos.

In total, 1,480 digital photos were produced in DC’s Chinatown, most of which were taken with the small portable digital camera and a small number with the digital camera on my cell phone. All photos were imported into a virtual album named “Chinatown” in the iPhoto program on my computer, which sorted the photos automatically into chronological order based on digital date and time stamps. Further, iPhoto allows me to code the photos by assigning each of them “Keywords,” such as “streets,” “festivals,” “spatial practice,” and “tourists.” Filtering the photos through a combination of keywords makes it possible to jump to relevant photos quickly. Photos of shop signs for the
quantitative analysis presented in Chapter 4 were coded separately along more refined dimensions in an Excel spreadsheet.

Despite the above advantages of photography as a research method for this project, the camera can be intrusive in some situations, for example, when I was eating alone in a restaurant and observing other customers’ ordering behavior. And rather obviously, a still digital camera cannot capture the spoken words, which can be recorded or noted down later in fieldnotes if an audio recorder is not available or permissible. Finally, while photography, when skillfully and systematically employed, can produce conceptual information such as social relation and socioeconomic status, for example, in a photo which shows clothing and seating arrangement of participants of a committee meeting, it is less direct than verbal data (e.g. interviews and analysis of policy documents) in conveying the more abstract, conceptual schemes, for example, what the meeting participants think of the newly proposed design. Thus, I will now turn to other methods of data collection to fill in these gaps.

*Doing Ethnography in Chinatown*

Referring back to the four types of well-triangulated data listed in Scollon and Scollon (2004), photography has assisted me with the “objective” and “naturalist” observation from my perspective as a researcher. In order to reach
the members' perspective on the linguistic landscape of Chinatown and the neighborhood in general, I conducted 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, from February to May in 2007, and then from September 2008 to November 2009. Doing fieldwork in such an urban location has presented its challenges, but it has generated insights that other methods would not have, and has even paved the road for other means of data collection, such as establishing contacts for interviews and gaining access to committee meetings.

The first question that arose when I was preparing for fieldwork was “Who are the members? Whose perspectives am I trying to reach?” However, like many other urban research settings, there is no “native” in Chinatown in the traditional anthropological sense of the word. There are a multitude of producers involved in the making of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape, and similarly, there are a multitude of consumers that experience and use it on a daily basis. Thus, the challenge for me is to find out who these people are and then how to experience Chinatown as they are experiencing it.

For this reason and also owning to the practical concern of the high expense involved in moving to Chinatown, I decided that it would not jeopardize my ethnographic experience to stay in my apartment in Glover Park, another neighborhood of Washington, DC, about 45 minutes away from
Chinatown by public transportation or 15 minutes by car. From there, I would visit Chinatown on a regular basis.

However, not living in the neighborhood made it even more necessary for me to find a role for myself to go there as often as I could. Fortunately, on my first ethnographic field trip to Chinatown to observe the Chinese Lunar New Year celebration on February 18, 2007, I took a break from the parade on the street by going inside a new building, where Chinatown Community Cultural Center turned out to be located. There, I happened to stand next to Mr. Wang, the unofficial Mayor of Chinatown, who, as I later found out, is also the founder and chair of the Chinatown Steering Committee, the community organization that has devised and enforced the guidelines for bilingual commercial signage. Thus, a fortunate stroke of serendipity opened the gate of Chinatown for me. Right during the celebration, Mr. Wang asked me if I would be interested in volunteering at the center and he introduced me to his daughter, who manages the Center’s activities on a daily basis. I filled out a volunteer application form, and a month later, started to teach a weekly English for Beginners class and continued to do so throughout fieldwork. In addition to these regular weekly field trips, I have also attended various community events and meetings, for which I mostly assumed the role of a community volunteer.
These weekly ESL classes, at the earlier stages of the fieldwork when my research focus was still unclear, helped me see what it is like for elderly low-income residents and newly arrived immigrants with limited English proficiency to live in Chinatown. In addition to being a way for me to give back to the community while at the same time learning from them, I also came to understand their sense of place in relation to the United States and their home country, China.

On a typical field day, I would take the bus down to Pennsylvania Avenue and 7th Street and walked up a few blocks to Chinatown. On my way, I passed through the Penn Quarter neighborhood, the Verizon Center, and many restaurants on 7th Street. This was an opportunity to observe spatial practices on the street. During each hour-long class, I taught mainly self-designed lessons that were tailored to their daily lives. There were usually about 10 students in the class, most of whom live in or around Chinatown. However, being a free community class, it was not required that students attend every class, so every day, I would see new faces or familiar ones that had just returned from visits to families outside the Washington area. As the students requested specific phrases and expressions that they could apply immediately, I learned more about their residential lives in low-income apartment housing complexes. For instance, learning how to complain to building management about pests was a topic that
they welcomed, whereas how to order food at restaurants seemed rather impractical to most of them. After class, some students would also come to me with mail and notices they had received, asking me to translate. By doing this free service, I also learned more about the type of housing they lived in and other language-related mobility issues. We also chatted about many other things in Mandarin Chinese and sometimes in Cantonese. After the students left, I would chat with Amanda (pseudonym), the manager of the Center. Because she works at the Center six days a week, Amanda provided me with much valuable information about what was going on during the week in the neighborhood. As she was also born and raised in a Chinese American family and is more fluent in English than in Chinese, we spoke English with each other most of the time and switched to Mandarin only every now and then. At the same time, she communicated with students in ESL class mostly in Chinese.

ESL is only one of the many classes that are offered at CCCC. For example, there was a free Taiji class immediately after my ESL class, led by a elderly Chinese in his eighties, referred to by everyone as Mr. Lei (pseudonym, but he was indeed addressed with the “Mr.” title), and an American Taiji student of his. The Taiji class ran from 11 am to 12 pm. Most people coming to Mr. Lei’s class were non-Chinese speaking office workers or residents in the Chinatown area or visitors, and Mr. Lei taught the Taiji class in English most of the time.
After watching them practice Taiji a few times, I also joined the class as a student in December 2007. While learning this traditional Chinese exercise, I reached out to other students for interviews, who represented very different perspectives on the place of Chinatown and its linguistic landscape from that of the students in the ESL class.

It was usually around noon when I left the center, and I would walk around on Chinatown’s streets, observing with my eyes and sometimes the camera what was going on, and occasionally going to a restaurant for lunch. On most field trips, I would jot down fieldnotes in a small notebook or type them up directly on my laptop computer in a café or restaurant outside Chinatown in the next neighborhood, Penn Quarter. This way, I could record fresh memories and still avoid running into anybody I knew in Chinatown, when my research tools (notebook, camera, and computer) were on full display in order to record fresh memories.

These 18 months of fieldwork produced 76 entries, over 30,000 words of fieldnotes, which I then read over and qualitatively coded for recurring prominent themes during analysis.
Meeting and Interviewing People in Chinatown

Between March 2007 and September 2009, I conducted 12 in-depth interviews with 13 individuals (two of them were interviewed together), who are related to the place of Chinatown in various ways. They include four elderly residents of Wah Luck House and another low-income housing complex located on K Street, about two blocks from Chinatown’s western boundary, four Chinese American current or former business owners, who are also active organizers of community events, three government employees and a university librarian, whose offices are located in or around the Chinatown area, and one white resident of a new condo building in Chinatown. The following table lists the interviewees, their age, ethnic background, relation to Chinatown, and whether they were asked to draw maps of Chinatown. All these interviews were recorded on an Olympus digital voice recorder with a Sony microphone.

As I have mentioned before, I made contacts with most of these individuals through ethnographic fieldwork, with the exception of the librarian who was the supervisor of my summer job. As she was very enthusiastic about my research, she generously offered her time to talk with me about Chinatown.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees (Pseudonyms for all but Mr. Wang)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relations to Chinatown</th>
<th>Map</th>
<th>Map video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Wang</td>
<td>80s</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Mayor of Chinatown; CCCC &amp; CSC founder and board member; former Chinatown business owner</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>CCCC manager; former Chinatown resident</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinatown business owner; CCCC &amp; CSC board member</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinatown business owner; CCCC executive director</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan Ayi</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese Chinatown resident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhao Ayi</td>
<td>80s</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese Chinatown resident</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Bobo &amp; Wen Ayi</td>
<td>80s</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese Chinatown residents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adeline</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian American Chinatown resident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Federal government employee with office in Chinatown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Federal government employee with office in Chinatown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Federal government employee with office in Chinatown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>University librarian with office near Chinatown; long-time DC resident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: List of recorded interviews and maps

After I started volunteering at CCCC, I had more opportunities to chat with Mr. Wang and his daughter, Amanda, the manager of CCCC. Mr. Wang is a
first-generation Chinese American who immigrated in the 1950s and earned his master’s degree in chemistry from Vanderbilt University. Since graduation, he moved to Washington, DC Chinatown. Together with his wife, he owned a restaurant, a grocery store, a furniture store, and a number of real-estate properties in Chinatown until the 1980s, when they sold everything and moved to Chevy Chase, Maryland. He has been active in community organizations ever since and still acts in some ways as the spokesperson for Chinatown, although he has been repeatedly saying that the future of Chinatown depends on the younger generations. Through Mr. Wang’s daughter, Amanda, and also by attending other community events at CCCC, I got to know Brian and Tiffany, who, like Amanda, are second-generation Chinese Americans actively involved in community affairs and whose families still own businesses in Chinatown (a gift and herbal store and a restaurant respectively). When the three of them led a high school student group (The China Exchange program) on a one-month tour of China in the summer of 2007, I happened to be in Shanghai and joined them for one day when they were in town. My interviews with Mr. Wang, Amanda and Brian took place in the activity space of CCCC; Tiffany invited me to lunch on the second floor of her family’s restaurant, and I conducted the interview with her there on a side table. Before interviews, I asked them in which language they would like be interviewed. Mr. Wang did not have a preference, but we spoke
Mandarin most of the time, occasionally switching to English. Amanda, Brian, and Tiffany all chose to be interviewed in English, because, as in Tiffany’s put it: “your English is better than my Chinese.” Regardless of the dominant language, in all three interviews, we frequently switched and mixed codes.

The four elderly Chinese residents of Chinatown interviewed were my “students” in the ESL class. Three of them are in their eighties; and the other in her seventies. They have been in the US for fewer than 10 years, and unlike Mr. Wang, they immigrated after their children. They all addressed me as laoshi (“teacher”) consistently, but treated me as if I were their grandchild; I, in turn, addressed them with their family names followed by Ayi (literally “aunt,” polite yet informal title for older women) and Bobo (literally “older uncle,” Ayi’s masculine equivalent). When I asked after class one day if anyone would be willing to do interviews with me for my research project, they left me their phone numbers. I followed up with them and made appointments. All of them invited me into their apartments to conduct the interviews. While I was in their apartments, they alsoentertained me with steamed dumplings, Chinese dishes, or fresh fruit. In return for their hospitality, I helped them transfer pictures from digital cameras to computers and with translating more letters. All these interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese.
Mr. Lei’s Taiji class at CCCC introduced me to Jeremy and Laura, two federal government employees with offices in Chinatown, both in their 50s. Jeremy studied Taiji with Mr. Lei before the CCCC opened in 2005 and was a volunteer co-instructor of the class when I joined. Laura was learning Taiji. They came to the Taiji class during their lunch hour, twice a week. Jeremy also introduced me to one of his co-workers, Mark, who is a long-time resident of the Washington, DC metropolitan area and who has worked in the government agency’s Chinatown office for more than ten years. Following Jeremy’s recommendation, interviews with all three of them were conducted in the indoor courtyard of the National Portrait Gallery on 7th Street.

Also through the Taiji class, I made friends with Adeline. An artist in her early thirties, Adeline is originally from North Carolina and has been living in a new condo building in Chinatown with her husband, a lawyer, for the past three years. Adeline is very interested in Chinese culture, especially traditional art. She was also taking brush painting classes at CCCC at that time. In addition, she is actively involved in neighborhood activities, especially at Calvary Church on H Street near 8th Street in Chinatown. Our interview took place over lunch on the second floor of Tony Cheng’s restaurant.

Finally, while working a part-time job in a university library located about 10 minutes’ walk east of Chinatown, my supervisor, Lillian, after hearing about
my project, offered to do an interview with me. A native of Northwest, Washington, DC, Lillian now lives in Virginia. She has worked in the library for more than 20 years and used to go down to Chinatown with colleagues quite often, especially on Chinese New Year. Our interview was conducted in a cubicle in Lillian’s office after hours on a weekday.

These 12 interviews range from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours in length and were all semi-structured. I prepared an interview guideline covering general categories of questions including (1) personal histories in relation to Chinatown, (2) changes in Chinatown, if any, (3) comparison with other Chinatowns, (4) places of shopping and dining, and (5) the future of Chinatown as they see it. In addition, I prepared more specific questions according to their personal backgrounds and specific relations to Chinatown. For example, with Mr. Wang, I asked more questions about community organizations and committees; with Chinatown residents, I asked more questions about their residential life and relationships with neighbors. During the interviews, I adopted a common practice in sociolinguistic interviews and did not follow the guidelines strictly, and I let the interviewees guide the direction of conversations for most of the time.

At the end of nine of these interviews, I also asked each interviewee to draw a map of Chinatown on a blank piece of paper and to tell me what they
were drawing during the task. These maps were then scanned and kept as digital image files on my computer. Five of the nine map drawing tasks were also captured in digital video format on a compact digital camera.

I have summarized the interviews in written interview reports and highlighted prominent themes in each but have transcribed only those sections in need of closer discourse analysis.

In short, the 12 interviews, nine maps, and five recorded map drawing sections provided me with invaluable data representing different individual perspectives, different individual experiences, and different generalizations of experiences of people related to Chinatown in various ways. Some of what they told me during the interview contradicted what I observed in fieldwork; some shed light on invisible personal history and political beliefs that underpin observable practices. As all but one of these interviews were individually conducted, I still lacked observation of how individual members interacted with each other, especially how individuals with different spatial ties to Chinatown interacted with each other, the last type of data on the list in Scollon and Scollon (2004).
**Video Recordings of Community Meetings and Events**

Video recording became the ideal research tool when I became aware of the community meetings reviewing shop signs and their relevance to my project. Fieldnotes, or even audio recordings, were no longer sufficient for capturing the full details of these speech events, for example, participant structure, for closer examination. Table 3.3 below shows the list of video recordings made during data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date &amp; Location</th>
<th>Event Name</th>
<th>Main Items</th>
<th>Length of Recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 3, 2007</td>
<td>CCCC Board End-of-Year Meeting</td>
<td>Board election</td>
<td>about 60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 7, 2008</td>
<td>CSC January Meeting</td>
<td>AT&amp;T Design Presentation &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>about 90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 20, 2008</td>
<td>Celebrating Guanggong, a historical Chinese figure</td>
<td>Ritual ceremony &amp; lion dance</td>
<td>about 90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 4, 2008</td>
<td>CSC February Meeting</td>
<td>Revised Gallery Tower Design</td>
<td>about 180 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10, 2008</td>
<td>Chinese Lunar New Year Celebration</td>
<td>Parade, spectators, &amp; center activities</td>
<td>about 90 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.3: List of video-recorded meetings and events**

Before I started doing fieldwork, video recording had not been among the research methods that I had anticipated using, mainly because at that time I did
not know what to record. In October 2007, about five months into fieldwork, I was chatting with Amanda as usual. At one point, she asked me, “What exactly are you writing in your paper?” (I had told them many times that it was for my dissertation, but most people I have encountered in Chinatown think of it in terms of a school paper.) I had been giving vague project topic such as “language and culture in Chinatown” up to that point, but at that moment, I realized Amanda was not satisfied with the answer, so I told her I was interested in the shop signs. There was a sign of relief on her face, perhaps because knowing exactly what my topic was made it easier for her to trust me. Then, she told me that I should attend the Chinatown Steering Committee meetings which take place on the first Monday evening of every month, during which they often discuss shop sign proposals presented by a representative from the Office of Planning of the DC Government. Up until that time, I had thought that Chinatown Steering Committee (CSC) was no longer active. During the first CSC meeting that I attended in November 2007, it was announced that there would be a discussion of the proposed shop sign for AT&T’s new flagship store. I realized then that these meetings would be important data, as they were part of the micro-level process contributing to the linguistic landscape of Chinatown.

At the meetings, I set up the small mini DV camcorder on a tripod and placed it about three to five feet away from the meeting tables. When there was a
Powerpoint presentation, I placed the camcorder facing the projection screen and presenters, but could only record the backs of other meeting participants. When the projection screen was not used, I placed the camcorder facing the meeting table and participants. Once the meetings began, I turned on the camcorder and left it standing on the tripod and joined other meeting participants, usually on the secondary row of chairs behind the meeting table. This seating allowed me to “hide” behind other participants sitting at the table and to write or sometimes even type up notes on my laptop computer without being obtrusive. At the same time, I also placed a digital voice recorder on the meeting table in case the camcorder failed to pick up sounds clearly.

Since these meetings are in nature public events and anyone could attend, individual written consent forms were not necessary, but I obtained verbal permission to record all meetings from Mr. Wang, who was the Chair of the Committee as well the meetings. In total, I recorded two CSC meetings, one CCCC board meeting, and two community ritual events using a mini DV camcorder. These mini DV tapes were then viewed and digitized as DVDs. Analysis has focused on the segments during the two CSC meetings where the case of AT&T’s flagship store signage proposal was presented, reviewed, and deliberated.
Gathering Public Discourses: Design Policy, Signage Proposals, and Other Documents

The last type of data that I collected during fieldwork include various types of documents distributed inside CCCC, on the street, or brought to my attention by people I have interacted with in Chinatown. They serve to answer two research questions: 1) How did the current linguistic landscape of Chinatown come about? and 2) How is Chinatown discursively constructed in other types of public discourse other than the linguistic landscape?

Among the types of documents listed in Table 3.4 below, signage design proposals and design policy documents (highlighted) in grey, provide valuable materials for the analysis of the production process of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape. The eight design proposals were distributed for review at the CSC committee meetings that I attended. Mr. Wang brought some of the design policy documents to my attention, and the others were mentioned on a poster mounted and displayed on the top of a cabinet in CCCC. They were then downloaded from the website of the Office of Planning and Office of Zoning.

Other documents in the set were either collected from the streets of Chinatown and a table in the CCCC on top of which a colorful array of flyers, event announcements, and promotional ads are neatly piled and can be picked freely or disseminated during community meetings and events in CCCC.
### Types of Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Documents</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design Policy Documents</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage Design Proposals</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCC Promotional Materials</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-CCCC Promotional Materials</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events &amp; Meetings Announcement</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety/Police Flyers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Flyers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures from Chinatowns in New York City, Seattle, and Amsterdam</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Handouts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Article</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCC Project Proposal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.4: List of documents collected during fieldwork**

Not included in the list of documents in the above table are a large number of other documents relevant to Chinatown, for example, many newspaper articles that can be found through a search in ProQuest Database. I have chosen to limit the dataset this way because I would like to focus on documents that are actually read and used by people in Chinatown. However, those peripheral documents have indeed provided me with invaluable information and could become data for focused analysis in future projects.
**Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented the geographic setting and historical background of Washington, DC Chinatown. Located in the center of the city, close to many tourist destinations, and surrounded by office buildings, Chinatown’s demography as well as its material surface and linguistic landscape have changed rapidly as a result of increased urban revitalization activities. The digital camera was an ideal tool for capturing the semiotic complexity and subtlety of its linguistic landscape, but it represented only my perspective as an observer. Doing ethnography in such a central, heterogeneous urban community presented challenges but yielded valuable insights regarding how the place of Chinatown is experienced and perceived from various perspectives. Fieldwork also paved ways for other types of data collection, including interviews, videotaping community meetings, and collecting policy documents.

Insights generated through analysis of the collected data are woven into a multidimensional understanding of linguistic landscape as concretely situated in its temporal and spatial contexts, which I will present in the analysis chapters. In Chapter 4 to follow, I will first present the findings from a quantitative and qualitative geosemiotic analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2003) of shop signs.
CHAPTER FOUR

A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE GEOSEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE
LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF WASHINGTON, DC CHINATOWN

Anticipating the potential danger of Chinatown’s gradual exit from the stage of
downtown Washington, the Chinatown Steering Committee, comprised of
prominent business figures in the local Chinese community, have devised and
administered a mandate in collaboration with the city’s Office of Planning for all
stores, Chinese and non-Chinese, located in the officially defined Chinatown
area, to carry Chinese signage. This mandate has resulted in a unique
phenomenon which has not been observed in other major North American
Chinatowns, that is, the spread of Chinese signage to non-Chinese, local and
global chains, for example, CVS pharmacy and Starbucks. My analysis starts in
this chapter with investigating this linguistic landscape in a geosemiotic framework
(Scollon and Scollon 2003). Although such a bilingual linguistic landscape seems
homogeneous, a close examination of its geosemiotic features reveals subtle
variation. Hence, a homotopia on the surface, Washington, DC Chinatown
epitomizes what Michel Foucault (1986 [1967]) has termed, a *heterotopia*, a place where multiple social times and spaces are juxtaposed.

This chapter starts by comparing linguistic landscape studies with a geosemiotic approach and suggesting ways in which the latter can complement the former. Then, I explain why shop signs are considered as an important component of Chinatowns’ linguistic landscape. The rest of the chapter presents qualitative and quantitative analyses of collected shop signs, and compares the geosemiotic features of non-Chinese stores’ signage with those of the Chinese stores. Finally, I argue that Washington DC Chinatown’s linguistic landscape has constituted a *heterotopia*, which opens up possibilities of divergent perceptions of Chinatown’s identity as a place.

**LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AND GEOSEMIOTIC ANALYSIS**

The current study shares many similarities with the growing body of research on *linguistic landscape* (e.g. the collection of studies in Gorter 2006a and Shohamy and Gorter 2009). The objects of analysis are the countless material and visual forms of language that surround us in everyday life. However, this project also differs from other linguistic landscape studies in its goal, its conceptualization of linguistic landscape, and consequently, its analytical methods.
The majority of existing studies examine linguistic landscape as a multilingual phenomenon and as a result of explicit or implicit language policies. Some of them aim at revealing de facto, or bottom-up, multilingual linguistic practices (e.g. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006); some examine multilingual linguistic landscape as a consequence of the spread of English world-wide (e.g. Backhaus 2006); and others conceive linguistic landscape as an index of political transformation and national identity (e.g. Scollon and Scollon 1998; Pan and Scollon 2000).

The current project bears a slightly different objective. Although the mandate issued by the Chinatown Steering Committee can be studied as a kind of bottom-up language policy (Spolsky 2004), I would like to focus on the dialogical connection between linguistic landscape and the place in which it is situated. In other words, if we are studying linguistic landscape as a text, I would like to put it back into its physical context, and investigate how text and context mutually constitute each other. This dialogical view of linguistic landscape is based on Scollon and Scollon (2003)’s theoretical framework – geosemiotics, the study of the semiotic aggregate, defined as “multiple semiotic systems in a dialogical interaction with each other” (12).

Because of this contextualized and dialogical conceptualization of linguistic landscape in the current study, I also employ a slightly different
methodological toolbox in my analysis. In addition to looking at language choice, which is a common focus of many linguistic landscape studies, drawing from Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and Scollon and Scollon (2003), I also examine code preference, text vectors, layout, and the physical emplacement of signs.

**SHOP SIGNS AND LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE**

In addition to the differences mentioned above, I limit my data to shop signs in this project as the main component of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape. As poetically narrated in *Chinatown*, an illustrated book for children: “Chinatown. City within a city. Home to street cobblers and herbalists, tai chi masters and kung fu students, outdoor fish markets and lots and lots of restaurants” (Low 1997, front flap), Chinatowns in North America are not only characterized by the ethnicity of its residents but also the sheer abundance of restaurants and stores. Shop signs, therefore, are a conspicuous part of Chinatown’s landscape. In this chapter, I present findings from a quantitative and qualitative geosemiotic analysis of Washington, DC Chinatown’s shop signs.
Language Choice

At the initial stage of this project, bilingual shop signs were taken for granted because contemporary Chinatowns are essentially situated in largely English-speaking cities. Table 4.1 below shows that 82.4% of the Chinese stores in Washington, DC Chinatown have bilingual signage. Co-presence of English and Chinese in shop signs seemed to be a natural index of the geographic location of overseas Chinatowns. However, a glance through a few available picture books of San Francisco’s Chinatowns in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (Genthe and Tchen 1984; Lee 2001) led me to the surprising realization that bilingual signs were not at all common in Chinatown’s history. Thus the issue of language choice is brought back into close examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese stores’ shop signs</th>
<th>Bilingual</th>
<th>Chinese-only</th>
<th>English-only</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Language Choice in Chinese Stores’ Shop Signs

Language choice in shop signs has been the focus of a few recent linguistic studies (Pan and Scollon 2000; de Saint-Georges and Norris 2002) exploring the public display of language ideologies or “linguistic landscape” (Ben-Raphael et al. 2006). For example, Pan and Scollon (2000) observe in their project that
monolingual Chinese shop signs index the store’s geographic location in mainland China or Taiwan, whereas bilingual Chinese and English shop signs would index Hong Kong, a post-colonial city.

The CVS pharmacy picture in Figure 4.1 provides an interesting comparison with photographs of Chinese herbal stores and pharmacies taken by Arnold Genthe sometime between 1895 to 1906 in San Francisco’s Chinatown (Genthe and Tchen 1984). In one of the historical photographs, the shop sign was written in traditional Chinese characters vertically carved on a wooden post at the corner of a building, advertising genuine medical herbs from Chinese provinces. In comparison, the photo in Figure 4.1 was taken in February 2004, at a street corner in Washington, DC Chinatown, next to the archway. The logo of the Western pharmacy chain, CVS, is placed in the vertical center of the sign, with the Chinese word for pharmacy “药房” (yàofáng, “pharmacy”) on top, and the word for grocery “杂货” (záhuò, literally “all kinds of goods”) at the bottom. Intriguingly, the word for pharmacy is written in simplified Chinese whereas the word for grocery in traditional Chinese. I will turn to the social significance of simplified versus traditional writing systems later in this section.
Reflected through the language choice in these two cases is a change in interaction order in Chinatowns in the past century. The monolingual drug store sign, on the one hand, excluded English speakers from its implied readers, and meanwhile positioned its owner as a businessman serving only the Chinese community. In fact, it was documented that “Chinese were generally barred from access to San Francisco’s hospitals and were unfairly blamed for many of the plagues that affected the city” (Genthe and Tchen 1984). Thus, the drug stores were sometimes also clinics, which had Chinese doctors to serve the medical needs of this segregated population.

In sharp contrast, today the CVS pharmacy’s bilingual shop sign includes both Chinese and English speaking communities as its implied readers. First, the
Chinese words above and below the logo explain the two primary functions of the store: pharmacy and grocery. Thus, Chinese readers who lack the necessary social-cultural knowledge can interpret what kind of store CVS is, for example, tourists from mainland China or Taiwan. In addition, the abbreviated shop logo CVS is accessible to both. As Scollon and Scollon (1998) observed in mainland China and Hong Kong, initial letters of international brand names, such as KFC and P&G, are probably well integrated into the Chinese language, despite the fact that what they stand for are often opaque to their Chinese readers. In brief, the implied readers of bilingual shop signs in contemporary Chinatowns include both English-speaking and Chinese-speaking customers rather than serving the latter exclusively as they were about a hundred years ago.

In addition to the choice of languages, the making of a shop sign in Chinatown also involves the choice between simplified and traditional writing systems, or both as we have seen in the CVS shop sign in Washington, DC (Figure 4.1 above). The simplified Chinese writing system is the predominant system used in mainland China as well as Singapore, while Hong Kong and Taiwan retain the use of traditional Chinese characters. The current simplified writing system is the culmination of a series of reforms in writing systems in mainland China since 1949. Along with the promotion of a standard spoken language (putonghua) and the romanization system (pinyin), the simplification of
Chinese characters was regarded by modern-minded scholars and the Chinese Communist Party as a critical step to modernize the Chinese language to meet the challenges of the modern world as well as to reduce the rate of illiteracy in the country (discussed in Norman 1988; Rohsenow 2001; Zhou and Ross 2004).

Considering the history behind the writing system, the pervasive use of simplified Chinese characters in signage in mainland China is a consequence of these nationwide language reforms (Scollon and Scollon 1998, 2003). Hong Kong’s persistence in the use of the traditional Chinese writing systems in public space is thus seen as positioning the region away from this revolutionary discourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Simplified</th>
<th>English-only</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese stores’ shop signs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Choice of Writing Systems in Chinese Stores’ Shop Signs

Given the fact that many of the older Chinese immigrants left mainland China before 1949, that is, before the language reforms, traditional Chinese characters are still the dominant code in shop signs in Washington, DC Chinatown. As shown in Table 4.2 almost all Chinese stores there (91.2%) carry signage inscribed in traditional Chinese characters, except the three stores which have only English signs. In contrast to the pervasiveness of traditional characters in Washington, DC Chinatown, in Boston Chinatown, shop signs written in
simplified Chinese characters were as common as those in traditional characters (see the Beijing video sign in Figure 4.2 for an example).

Figure 4.2: Beijing Video, Chinatown in Boston

This difference suggests that the newer wave of Chinese immigrants from mainland China has not affected the Chinatown in downtown Washington, DC as much as in Boston. In fact, more recent immigrants from China have chosen to live in the suburbs of the Washington Metropolitan area, including nearby towns in Maryland and Virginia, where they can own bigger houses and send their children to better schools. Notably according to the 2000 Census, the Asian population in Rockville, Maryland has increased by 60.5 percent since 1990 (Nicholls 2003). As observed by a noodle shop owner in Rockville, “In old Chinatowns people live and work in one neighborhood, one small area. Here we
drive from store to store. But that’s okay. The new immigrants all have their own vehicles” (quoted in Nicholls 2003, F1). The absence of simplified Chinese shop signs of Chinatown’s Chinese stores is indicative of this changing socio-economic status and lifestyle of Chinese immigrants.

In summary, language choice in shop signs indexes simultaneously the new and old kinds of interaction order in Washington, DC Chinatown. It is new, because as indicated by the bilingual signage, it is more integrated into the surrounding neighborhoods of the city than Chinatowns at the beginning of the last century; it is also “old,” because as gleaned from the pervasive use of traditional Chinese shop signs, Washington, DC Chinatown has not absorbed the vitality of the more recent and younger immigrants from China. It is a Chinatown of the present as well as a Chinatown of the past. In addition to the socio-historical information conveyed by choices of languages and writing systems, the next section addresses the subtle linguistic and ethnic priority revealed through the examination of code preference.

**Code Preference**

Building on Kress and van Leeuwen’s visual grammar (1996), Scollon and Scollon (2003) have extended the discussion of language choice to include code preference, “the relationship between two or more languages in bilingual
(multilingual) signs and pictures” (209). A code placed above another code is considered to be preferred as well as the code appearing in the center position.

In DC’s Chinatown, the shop signs of most Chinese stores have Chinese characters in visually prominent positions, either in the center or above the English store names (see the seafood restaurant sign in Figure 4.3 for an example). In some cases when the Chinese name is in a less preferred position, it is still highlighted by a brighter color. As shown in Figure 4.4, the Taishan restaurant’s storefront has two parts: the English name of the restaurant on the red awning and its Chinese name in bright yellow fixed on the red-colored wall. Table 4.3 below summarizes code preference in Chinese stores’ shop signs.

Figure 4.3: Kam Fong Seafood Restaurant, Chinatown, Washington, DC
Table 4.3: Code Preference in Chinese Stores’ Shop Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese Preferred</th>
<th>Equal Preference</th>
<th>English Preferred</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese stores’ shop signs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, as we will see in the second part of the analysis, although the non-Chinese stores display Chinese characters as required by the mandate, their Chinese signs are often de-emphasized through various semiotic means.

**Text Vectors**

In addition to language choice and code preference, text vector is the other geosemiotic feature of Chinese shop signs that has changed over time. Text
vector refers to “the normal or conventional reading direction of text in a language” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 216). They note, “because Chinese has the possibility of both left to right and right to left text vectors, the text vectors themselves are exploited to situate the sign in relationship to the geosemiotic world. Generally speaking, and with very few exceptions in our data, the base of the text vector, that is the point from where the reading starts, is located at the most salient point. These ‘salient points’ consist of doorways, corners of building” (153). Some cases of deviation from Scollon and Scollon’s observation are noted in Chinatown’s shop signs. While the top down text vector is still commonly used, the right to left vector is reserved for places which perhaps have existed for at least half a century, for example, the guesthouse in Washington, DC Chinatown shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Zhaolun Guest House, Chinatown, Washington, DC
The left to right text vector in contemporary Chinese writing is a result of the Baihuawen Yundong ("Vernacular writing style movement") in the early 1900s, which sought to modernize the Chinese language as a means to promote modern ways of thinking. Western-educated Chinese individuals leading the movement pushed written Chinese closer to the style of modern Romance languages in many ways, including reversing the traditional right to left text vector (Norman 1988). Nowadays, the right to left vector is reserved for symbolic use of traditional Chinese culture, as often seen on the center banner of Chinatown’s archways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese stores’ shop signs</th>
<th>Left-Right</th>
<th>Left-Right &amp; Right-Left</th>
<th>Right-Left</th>
<th>Top-Bottom</th>
<th>Top-Bottom &amp; Left-Right</th>
<th>N.A.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Text Vectors in Chinese Stores’ Shop Signs

As shown above in Table 4.4, 35.3% of the Chinese stores have both top-bottom and left-right text vectors in their main signs, partially because of the multiple shop signs that they carry. The second most frequent is the left-right text vector that characterizes the modernization of the Chinese language. Illustrated in the storefront of the Eat First Restaurant (Figure 4.6), even when there is a salient point available, that is, the red center sign, both the horizontal
English and Chinese signs are inscribed from left to right rather than emanating from the center.

As the reader may have already noticed from the above examples, many of the shop signs are symmetrical in composition, with a horizontal plate placed on top and two vertical plates at the sides. Similar to the right to left text vector, symmetry is often associated with “traditional” Chinese culture. Nowadays in China, it can be most easily found in couplets on household doors during the
Spring Festival or in the couplets inscribed on the pillars of any hall in a temple or palace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Symmetrical</th>
<th>Non-Symmetrical</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese stores' shop signs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Symmetrical Composition in Chinese Stores' Shop Signs

This preference for symmetrical composition is commonly found in Chinese shop signs in DC’s Chinatown (see Table 4.5 above for a summary). One of the means to achieve symmetrical composition is to split the Chinese name and put the English name in the center, as shown on the awning of Tai Shan Restaurant in Figure 4.4. Other ways to achieve symmetrical layout include repetition, as we have already seen in the shop sign of the restaurant Eat First in Figure 4.6.

*Emplacement*

Similar to the above discussion of symmetrical composition, the manner in which a Chinese shop sign is physically mounted had indicated continuity from “traditional” Chinese culture. *Transgressive emplacement* refers to any placement of a sign in the “wrong” place (Scollon and Scollon 2003). It is important to note that the judgment regarding transgression is contingent upon the reader and also the community that s/he belongs to. Thus, a noodle shop sign fixed outside of
the arcade of an elegant building in post-colonial Shanghai is perhaps only transgressive to researchers who have the knowledge of the Western aesthetic function of the arcade but not to someone who grew up in Shanghai and is hence familiar with this kind of semiotic practice.

Similar “transgressive” emplacement of shop signs is observed in Washington, DC Chinatown. As shown in Figure 4.7, the shop sign of the Chopsticks Restaurant is vertically fixated upon the whitewashed brick wall and extends outwards into the space above the sidewalk. And as Table 4.6 shows, transgressive sign emplacement is pervasive in Chinatown.

Figure 4.7: Chopsticks Restaurant, Chinatown, Washington, DC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transgressive</th>
<th>Subtle</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese stores’ shop signs</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6: Emplacement in Chinese Stores’ Shop Signs

This type of fixture would be considered transgressive were it to occur in shop fronts attached to brick townhouses commonly found elsewhere in Washington, DC. As Scollon and Scollon (2003) pointed out, “there was and to some extent still is within European and Western aesthetics of urban design a preference for urban surfaces without signs as an expression of high levels of elegance” (149). However, the transgression of emplacement of shop signs is legitimate due to its situatedness in Chinatowns. Even non-Chinese business enterprises, such as the Starbucks in Chinatown, have adopted this transgressive use of semiotic space. This phenomenon of geosemiotic features commonly associated with Chinese stores’ shop signs spreading to non-Chinese stores is the final finding to which I will turn next.

To summarize the preceding discussion, the geosemiotic features of Chinese stores’ shop signs present Washington, DC’s Chinatown as simultaneously traditional and contemporary. First, with the increasing integration of Chinatown into the urban environment in which it is situated, bilingual and multilingual signs are used instead of monolingual Chinese signs as in the early 20th century. On the other hand, the predominant presence of
traditional Chinese characters in the shop signs is indicative of the absence of newer Chinese immigrants from the urban scene of downtown Chinatown. Second, in the bilingual Chinese-English signage, the Chinese store names tend to be placed in a preferred position in the shop signs of Chinese stores, which as we will see is different from the Chinese signs of non-Chinese stores. Third, the prevalent left to right text vector in shop signs positions the DC’s Chinatown after the 1920s on the timeline of history, because the *Baihuawen Yudong* (Vernacular Writing Movement) successfully changed the traditional right to left text vector in mainland China around the turn of the 20th century. Finally, the symmetrical composition and “transgressive” emplacement of the signs show to some degree Chinatown’s connection with traditional Chinese aesthetics and conception of space.

In the second part of the chapter, we will see the similarities and differences between the Chinese signage of non-Chinese businesses with those of Chinese stores as discussed before.

**Geosemiotic Characteristics of Non-Chinese Stores’ Signage**

Within the two blocks of Washington, DC Chinatown, 51 out of 89 stores, that is 57.3%, are not Chinese or Asian, for example, Washington Sports Club, Starbucks, United Colors of Benetton (changed to an AT&T flagship retail store
in 2007), and Urban Outfitters. Required by the mandate issued by the Chinatown Steering Committee, most of them carry Chinese signage. These Chinese shop signs are similar to those of Chinese stores in language choice, text vector, symmetrical composition, and transgressive emplacement; however, they differ in code preference, content of the sign, and color.

**Similarities with Chinese Stores' Signage**

The first similarity of shop signs of non-Chinese and Chinese stores is, quite evidently, the use of bilingual Chinese-English shop signs. The photo in Figure 4.8 shows one sign of the MCI sports center (changed name to the Verizon Center in 2006), a 20,000-seat multifunctional arena.

![MCI Center (now Verizon Center), Chinatown, Washington, DC](image)

**Figure 4.8: MCI Center (now Verizon Center), Chinatown, Washington, DC**
Its Chinese name 體育中心 (tiyu zhongxin, “sports center”) is written in traditional Chinese characters in calligraphic style. This translation is generic about the primary function of the arena, which is, hosting sports events, although the MCI center also hosts non-sports events, such as concerts. Interestingly, the Chinese side of the sign of the MCI center (Figure 4.8) faces inward to the center of Chinatown. The other side of the same sign saying “MCI” faces away from the center of Chinatown. As the building of the MCI center sits on the edge of Chinatown, the directionality of this code separation clearly marks a semiotic boundary.

Similar to the MCI Center, a number of non-Chinese stores have adopted the vertical text vector in their signage. As illustrated in the banner of the Goethe Institute located in the Chinatown area (Figure 4.9), the vertical text vector assumes the bottom-up direction. Although this inverted text vector is not uncommon nowadays in China, it is the top to bottom text vector that is more frequently used and associated with traditional Chinese writing.
Another example of vertical text vector is Starbucks in Figure 4.10, which also serves as an illustration of transgressive emplacement. Its Chinese name 星巴克咖啡 (xingbake Kafei, “Starbucks Coffee”) is inscribed in Chinese characters in modern sans-serif font. A green circle surrounds each character. Six such circles are vertically ordered and fixed by black steel shafts to the elegant maroon brick siding of the rowhouse. Such placement of shop signs would be considered to be “transgressive” in other parts of Washington, DC, but it seems to become legitimatized when situated in Chinatown. As we have also seen, not only Chinese restaurants such as Eat First (Figure 4.6) but non-Chinese business such as the MCI Center (Figure 4.8) have also adopted this practice.
Finally, it is noticeable that many non-Chinese stores have used symmetrical layout in their Chinese shop signs.
In this example of Ruby Tuesday’s shop sign (Figure 4.11), the four characters of its Chinese name are split into two parts flanking its English name to achieve symmetry, which is similar to the strategy we saw above in the shop sign of Tai Shan Restaurant (Figure 4.4). In the shop sign for Subway (Figure 4.12), a sandwich franchise, its Chinese name, a clever transliteration, 赛百味 (Saibaiwei, literally means “better than a hundred delicacies”), is repeated two times once on the left and once on the right of its English name in order for the shop sign to be symmetrical in layout.

In brief, the examples in this section show the similarities between the shop signs of non-Chinese businesses with those of the Chinese businesses.
Table 4.7: Geosemiotic Features spread from Chinese to Non-Chinese Stores

Table 4.7 above summarizes the similarities between Chinese and non-Chinese stores’ shop signs. In the following section, I discuss how they differ from each other.

**Differences from Chinese Stores’ Signage**

While non-Chinese stores comply with the mandate to adopt Chinese signage, they diverge in three subtle yet significant ways, specifically in code preference, content of signs, and color scheme.

First, in contrast to the visual prominence given to Chinese in the shop signs of Chinese stores, non-Chinese stores often place English in a more visible position. Both Ruby Tuesday (Figure 4.11) and Subway (Figure 4.12) have their English store name in the center of the sign. On the storefront of some other retail businesses, the Chinese sign is not only in a less preferred position but is also de-emphasized through other visual means.

In Figure 4.13, on the storefront of Urban Outfitters, an international fashion chain, the Chinese phrase on the left says 男女服装 (nannü fuzhuang, 128...
“men and women’s clothing”), and the one on the right says 家庭用品 (jiating yongpin, “household goods”), which describe the types of commodities sold in the store. The Chinese components of the sign are posted flatly against the wall in an add-on manner. In fact, they would hardly be noticed were it not for the 10 times optical zoom of the digital camera used for the project. In stark contrast, the English store name URBAN OUTFITTERS is inscribed in a specially designed typeface, all capital letters, and on large three-dimensional plastic blocks.

Figure 4.13: Urban Outfitters, Chinatown, Washington, DC

Also illustrated in this example is the difference in the content of shop signs adopted by non-Chinese businesses. A few stores such as Urban Outfitters as shown above, an Irish bar, and another sandwich chain do not have translated Chinese names as Saibaiwei for Subway. The Chinese signage on these stores
display the kinds of commodities sold at the store. In contrast, all Chinese businesses have Chinese store names.

The last subtle difference lies in the color scheme. Non-Chinese businesses in the Chinatown area maintain corporate identities by using the same color scheme in the English and Chinese components of their shop signs. To name a few examples, the Chinese sign of the Goethe Institute is printed in white characters against a background of their institutional light green (Figure 4.9), the characters in the Starbucks’ shop sign are placed inside green circles just as their mermaid logo (Figure 4.10), and the Chinese signage on Urban Outfitters’s storefront shares the same blue color with its English store name (Figure 4.13). When the MCI Center changed ownership and name to the Verizon Center in 2006, only the color scheme and the English side of the sign changed. The Chinese side of the sign (Sports Center) remained the same only in Verizon’s corporate color of red and black. By comparison, the color of Chinese stores’ shop signs are not chosen specifically for the display of individual corporate identity. Green, red, and gold or yellow is the color scheme used consistently across Chinese-run restaurants and stores, as exemplified in the shop sign and also exterior decoration of the restaurant Chinatown Garden in the photo below (Figure 4.14). Below the roof, their Chinese store name is inscribed in gold color with each character inside a green circle, the frames of the windows and door are
painted red, and the decorative roof over the extension on the first floor is covered with green tiles. Table 4.8 below compares the non-Chinese stores’ shop signs with those of the Chinese stores in terms of code preference, content, and color.

![Chinatown Garden, Chinatown, Washington, DC](image)

Figure 4.14: Chinatown Garden, Chinatown, Washington, DC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Stores’ Shop Signs</th>
<th>Chinese Preferred</th>
<th>Store/brand name in Chinese</th>
<th>Chinese Color Scheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18/34</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>32/34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>33/34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>97.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Non-Chinese Stores’ Shop Signs | 1/55 | 1.8% | 21/55 | 38.2% | 8/55 | 14.5% |

Table 4.8: Difference in Non-Chinese Stores' Shop Signs from Chinese Stores' Signage

In summary, through a comparison of the geosemiotic features of Chinese and non-Chinese stores’ shop signs, we have found similarities and differences.
On the surface, it seems that the mandate administered by the Chinatown Steering Committee has effectively produced a homogeneous Chinese appearance of Chinatown by requiring all businesses to adopt Chinese signage; beneath the surface, we have noticed nuances in the semiotic practices, especially in terms of code preference, content, and color schemes which reveal heterogeneity.

**CHINATOWN AS HETEROTOPIA**

The mandate issued and administered by the Chinatown Steering Committee produced, on the surface, a homogeneous linguistic landscape in Washington, DC Chinatown, where Chinese and non-Chinese businesses are required to carry Chinese signage in addition to English shop signs (Pyatt 1999). However, a geosemiotic analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2003) of the shop signs as presented in this chapter uncovers the nuances between the Chinese signage adopted by the non-Chinese stores and those of the Chinese stores. Although the intention of the stakeholders behind the mandate is to preserve the traditional characteristics of the area, the subtle divergences in the non-Chinese businesses’ semiotic practices suggest that the preservation effort has unwittingly turned Chinatown into a heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]).
Heterotopias are “real places, ... a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (3). The linguistic landscape of DC’s Chinatown has become such a heterogeneous place, and the geosemiotic features of its shop signs epitomize the principles that Foucault has envisioned of heterotopias.

Comparing the language choice, text vector, symmetrical composition, and physical emplacement of shop signs in contemporary Chinatown with those in Chinatowns at the beginning of the 20th century, we have seen a Chinatown that is simultaneously old and new. Similar to other heterotopias discussed by Foucault (1986 [1967]), it is “linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies” (5). The Chinatown has evolved over time in the pervasive use of bilingual or multilingual signage, but it has also retained history and tradition by using traditional Chinese characters as well as a symmetrical layout.

This comparison has also shown a downtown Chinatown that is set against the recent settlement of newer Chinese immigrants in the suburbs. With elevated socio-economic status and increasingly suburbanized lifestyle, fewer and fewer Chinese immigrants would choose to live downtown (Knipp 2005). For many of them, the downtown Chinatown becomes a symbolic place where
their heart belongs (Ly 2001). In this way, the Chinatown possesses the last trait of heterotopia in its “role to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned” (Foucault 1986 [1967], 6).

Furthermore, contrasting shop signs used by Chinese stores with those adopted by non-Chinese stores, we find that, although the latter, in compliance with the mandate, exhibits some similar geosemiotic features of the former, namely, bilingual signage, symmetrical layout, text vector, and transgressive emplacement, they diverge in a subtle yet meaningful way in terms of code preference, content of sign, and color scheme. These nuances present DC’s Chinatown as “a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (6). Indeed, the administration of the mandate is an effort to preserve the boundary of an ethnic neighborhood and at the same time a compromise made by the Chinese community in the fierce competition for highly valued downtown commercial space. On the other hand, non-Chinese businesses’ compliance with the mandate is a deal they made with the community in order to gain entry into this area. Yet as we have seen, some of them have also employed various semiotic means to visually minimize the Chinese components of their outdoor signage. In this way, Chinese signage becomes a key to penetrating the semiotically enclosed system.
Finally, all the above discussions position Chinatown as “a single real place” where “several sites that are in themselves incompatible” are juxtaposed (5). Distilled in these subtle differences are the competing discourses of preservation, development, and revitalization. As a heterotopia, it contrasts and mirrors its past, its contemporary, and its opposition. A close examination of the geosemiotic forms of the shop signs enables us to understand the multiple facets of this place of Chinatown in relation to other spaces.

**SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I use the theoretical framework of *geosemiotics* (Scollon and Scollon 2003) to examine the linguistic landscape of the Chinatown in Washington, DC as a *semiotic aggregate*. Through diachronic comparison with historic photographs of Chinatowns more than a century ago and synchronic comparison between Chinese and non-Chinese stores, we are able to discern their nuances as well as similarities. These findings present DC’s Chinatown as a polyvocal place, a heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]).

Fortunately, the social inequality beneath the glossy surface of the Chinatown in this study is not as harsh as that of Baltimore as described in Harvey (2000), where the revival and development of some urban areas prevent people from seeing the other parts of the city filled with deserted houses. After
all, newer waves of Chinese immigrants have in general found a better dwelling place in the more affluent suburbs, and their possession of cars enables them to shop for Chinese food and products in Asian supermarkets dispersed across the suburbs of the Washington Metropolitan area. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this critical semiotic analysis of Chinatown’s shop signs will alert the involved parties, as well as observers, of the complexity involved in urban revitalization programs. The emergence of the heterotopic Chinatown is probably inevitable and beyond the intentions of those who devised the mandate. However, it is better to recognize its heterogeneous nature than taking it as a lucrative program of urban revitalization without also recognizing the conflicts and compromises made. In the following chapter, I will trace multiple socio-historical processes on various timescales that lead to the current linguistic landscape of Chinatown.
CHAPTER FIVE

SITUATING LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN TIME

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the geosemiotic features (e.g. language, code preference, color scheme, text vector, and physical emplacement) of the shop signs in Washington, DC Chinatown quantitatively and qualitatively. Based on the analysis, I argued that today’s Chinatown exemplifies what Foucault (1986 [1967]) calls a heterotopia, a place where the past and the present, the local and the global, the “native” and the “foreign” are juxtaposed. While such heterogeneity can be revealed through diachronic and synchronic comparisons of signage, the question that remains unanswered is: How did such juxtaposition take place? More specifically, how did the current linguistic landscape of Chinatown come about? As proposed in the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, the mainly descriptive methods employed in linguistic landscape research do not suffice to answer this question, nor does a simple historical account of the process of making linguistic landscape. This and the following chapters attempt to address this question from temporal and spatial perspectives respectively. In Chapter 6, I analyze how linguistic landscape is situated in an amalgamation of ritual and lived, inside and outside, local and global spaces. Before that, in this
chapter, I situate linguistic landscape in the multiple temporal trajectories of its emergence and development, in order to understand how “different slices of time” (Foucault 1986 [1967]) are linked together in the process of discursively constructing Washington, DC Chinatown.

I start by defining several key concepts in discourse analysis and linguistic anthropology that are instrumental for discerning the relationship between text and time and the temporal nature of text itself. After discussing how these separately developed concepts can be integrated using the framework of timescales (Lemke 2000) and discourse cycles (Scollon and Scollon 2004), I outline three main timescales in which multiple historical processes contribute to the production of DC Chinatown’s linguistic landscape. The analysis of each timescale is guided by attention to the changes in participant structure, material, political, and economic resources, and even the Chinese names for Chinatown. I conclude by discussing how these timescales are interrelated and the implications of their interconnection or disconnection for the ambivalent place identity of Washington, DC Chinatown.
TEXT AND HISTORY, HISTORY OF TEXT: TRACING DISCOURSE TRAJECTORIES ON MULTIPLE TIMESCALES

Approaching the temporal dimension of linguistic landscape, I find two approaches in discourse analysis and linguistic anthropology particularly helpful: the first seeks to establish links between text and historical process (e.g. Blommaert 2005), and the second focuses on text itself as a historical process (e.g. Silverstein and Urban 1996; Iedema 2001, 2003). While each approach has its own analytical advantages and disadvantages, I suggest that they can be meaningfully integrated into a system of timescales (Lemke 2000) and nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004) in order to address the perennial concern of sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologist (e.g. Grimshaw 2001; Wortham 2006): How is a micro-level interactional process, for example, a community meeting, connected with a macro-level process such as the emergence of Chinatown as a cultural category? More importantly, both approaches provide us with tools for analyzing the different roles that language and discourse play in mediating these processes on different timescales.

In a sense, Foucault’s heterotopia (the juxtaposition of past and present in one place) can be seen as the spatial equivalent of layered simultaneity (Blommaert 2005) in discourse, referring to the collapsing of multiple historical processes in text. Blommaert’s concept of layered simultaneity was based on the work of
Braudel and Wallerstein, both historians. According to Blommaert, Braudel distinguishes three layered time-scales: 1) slow time or structural time (the ‘longue durée’); intermediate time, or conjunctural time (the time of long cyclical patterns); and the événement, event time. Change in the higher-level process on the scale of the slow time is often beyond individual consciousness, e.g. the emerging process of economic downturn, whereas people are usually more aware of an event on the shorter but faster timescale, e.g. the job loss of a friend. As we will see later, this historian’s conceptual model is extremely similar to the idea of timescales developed in biology and physics, which were introduced by Lemke (2001, 2005) into the study of human eco-social systems. However, Blommaert’s objective is not so much to expand and discern these different layers as to investigate how these different processes become blurred in discourse. In addition, this approach to text and history inspired by the work of historians is also helpful in understanding how a cultural category such as “Chinatown” emerges and develops, and how it is related to historical processes such as US immigration legislation, political events in Chinatown, and urban economic restructuring in Washington, DC. However, thanks to its broader focus of analysis, this approach does not address participants and resources, for which I will now turn to the second approach to text and history.
Three interrelated concepts in this second approach are entextualization, recontextualization, and resemiotization. Entextualization refers to the process during which social interaction sediments as text, which moves rather autonomously from context to context (Silverstein and Urban 1996). Thus, entextualization is at the same time also recontextualization. Investigating the entextualization process is especially revealing of the complicated and shifting participant structure. As Silverstein and Urban (1996) have noted, “entextualization involves assessments of participants’ power and authority, such that entextualization both reflects and constitutes asymmetrical social relations” (4). Thus, studying the entextualization process of the linguistic landscape of DC Chinatown will also generate insights regarding the participants at various stages of production and the asymmetrical relationships among them.

Closely related to entextualization and recontextualization is the term resemiotization (Iedema 2001, 2003), referring to the translation of text from one semiotic mode to another. The analytical value of resemiotization lies in its attention to the semiotic and material forms of text, and how they contribute to the textual meaning. Therefore, taking entextualization, recontextualization, and resemiotization into consideration provides a versatile toolbox for analyzing the array of participants and resources, both material and discursive, in the production
process of linguistic landscape. However, these concepts tend to be employed in a longitudinal study of a single process (with few exceptions such as Lempert 2004, 2007). The objective of this chapter is to explore “the linkage” by integrating the two approaches to the temporal dimension of text outlined above in a timescale framework.

As mentioned before, the timescale model (Lemke 2001) is very similar to Braudel’s time-scales discussed in Blommaert (2005) but is more flexible than the latter in terms of the number and types of time-scales considered. While as a historian, Braudel differentiates only three timescales (the shortest one being the event), Lemke considers a wide range of timescales from $10^{-5}$ second of chemical synthesis to 32 billion years of universal change (Lemke 2001, 277). Thus, the concept of timescale is more useful for sociolinguistic analysis, as in this model, it is possible to take into account units of analysis from the enunciation of an utterance to the emergence of a new genre.

This multiple-timescale analysis is introduced by Lemke (2001, 2003) from dynamical theories of complex systems into the study of human activities in eco-social systems. It provides a framework for connecting micro-level social interaction, which runs faster on a shorter timescale, to macro-level social process, which runs more slowly on a longer timescale. Whereas in a physical system, energy transfers only between adjacent timescales (known as the adiabatic
principle), in human social organization, remote non-adjacent timescales interact with each other. Lemke calls such phenomenon “heterochrony,” and suggests that it is the material-semiotic artifacts that make the interaction between processes on different timescales possible.

Using the science classroom as a key example, Lemke analyzes how material-semiotic artifacts, such as student notebooks and textbooks, mediate the circulation of knowledge. In one instance, some students browse through their notebooks when the teacher asks a question. The notebook, as both a material object and a meaningful text, links an event in the past (e.g. note-taking in the previous lesson) to the current event of answering the question, and thus it participates on a longer timescale than the event of a single lesson. In the second instance, the teacher lectures and poses a question from the textbook. The textbook, again as a material-semiotic object, connects the production process of the textbook and the even longer process during which the discourse patterns of science textbooks emerge with the shorter timescale of one classroom lesson. In the classroom, material-semiotic objects are not limited to textual records such as notebooks and textbooks. The physical room, seat layout, scissors, and so on, are not only things, but also signs that are indexical of the culture of schooling on a much longer timescale. In addition, Lemke reflects that every academic discipline focuses on a certain timescale. For example, conversation analysts
usually take less than an hour of interaction as the timescale of analysis; ethnographers normally spend a year in the field; biographers are interested in a lifetime; historians are concerned with decades and centuries. Therefore, from this perspective, it is theoretically possible to combine the historical and ethnographic approaches to text and history in an interdisciplinary framework.

This theoretical possibility is more fully developed by Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon (2004) in their framework of nexus analysis. While Lemke looks at how “boundary objects” or material-semiotic artifact mediate across timescales, Scollon and Scollon focus on concrete social action as a point in the nexus where multiple social processes flow into and emanate from. They identify three main types of processes that condition social actions: interaction order, discourse in place, and the historical body (similar to Bourdieu’s habitus) of individual social actors. By tracing the trajectories of each of these components using ethnography and discourse analysis, Scollon and Scollon offer a concrete methodological guide and “avoid many of the usual mistakes, like opting for ‘macro’ at the expense of ‘micro,’ or vice versa, or declaring a ‘macro-micro dialectic’ while gesturing vaguely toward the processes actually involved in such a dialectic” (Wortham 2006, 128).

As nexus analysis was offered as a heuristic guide rather than a definitive theory, I venture to combine it with mediated discourse analysis, another important
framework developed by Ron Scollon (2001), in order to tailor the framework to the main research questions in this chapter. Thus, I will focus on the trajectories of mediated discourse (e.g. linguistic landscape, policy documents, meeting discussion, the Chinese names of “Chinatown”), the trajectories of social actors (e.g. generations of immigrants, relationships among these participants), and the trajectories of mediational means (e.g. linguistic, economic, and political resources) on each of the timescales. Then, I will discuss how these multiple processes circulate through social interactions during two community meetings where a store’s shop sign design was presented, deliberated, contested, and finally approved in concession.

I will start with the longest timescale of more than a century on which the history of Chinese immigration to the United State interacts with several other parallel historical processes in the US and China. Then, I move down to the intermediate timescale of two decades, with special attention to how the urban revitalization project in downtown DC has shaped Chinatown’s design policy. Finally, I will focus on how the changes on these longer timescales influenced the micro-level process of social interaction during community meetings.
Changes in Chinatown over a Century: People, Economy and Politics

On this longest timescale, I will describe how Chinatown in general and the Chinatown in Washington, DC have emerged, developed, and changed over the past 120 years or so. I will pay special attention to the settlement pattern of Chinese immigrants, the economic structure of Chinatown, and the national and international political environment during this historical period, because, as we will see in the following sections, they all carry implications for participants and resources involved in policy making and shop sign design on shorter timescales, and they also explain the political and economic factors that contribute to more recent changes in Chinatown.

A Brief History of Chinese Immigration to the United States

Most scholarly treatises on American Chinatowns (e.g. Wong 1982; Wong 1995; Chow 1996; Kwong 1996; Lee 2001) agree that Chinatowns emerged and developed as a defense mechanism against a hostile racial environment during the Exclusion Era from 1882 to around 1945. The first wave of Chinese were brought to the United States by mining companies as cheap labor during the California gold rush in the 1840s. These earlier settlers, also known as “coolies” (a loan word from Chinese, kuli, “bitter labor”), continued to work as manual laborers for other projects, such as the most difficult sections of the
transcontinental railroad. However, their gradual incorporation into the American working class and tolerance of low wages triggered resentment from white American workers, which spread more widely to the entire American society. This friction culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, barring all immigration of Chinese laborers. This federal law not only stopped more Chinese from coming to the United States but also created an extremely hostile environment for those who were already in the country. Driven out of small towns into major cities on the West Coast and then the East Coast, they took refuge in urban ghettos. As Kwong (1996) stresses, “The shift of Chinese into these urban ghettos was not voluntary. ... Rather, they were segregated areas where the Chinese were meant to stay. The segregation was maintained by the exclusion of Chinese from the larger labor market” (13-14). Because most of these laborers were bachelors when they came and the court denied the entry of the wives of the married ones, the original Chinatown emerged as a bachelors’ society with few families. There were about 89,863 Chinese in the US by the end of the nineteenth century. The number rose slightly through illegal immigration during the next fifty years. As they were largely prevented from participating in mainstream American society, a political and social structure emerged independently within Chinatowns, mainly based on family and village associations. Although initially, these organizations united Chinese immigrants
against external discrimination, they later also created a polarized social structure in which the working class was dominated and exploited by the political and business elite. Virtually isolated from the rest of their urban environments, Chinatowns also fueled the imaginations of outside observers, giving rise to the skewed portrayal of it as “a vice district of gambling, opium smoking, and the female slave trade, all under the control of a mysterious underground network of tongs (secret societies) and hired thugs” (Wong 1995, 4).

It was against this historical backdrop that the Chinatown in Washington, DC initially developed and expanded along Pennsylvania Avenue near the Capitol, as more laborers moved from the West Coast to cities on the East Coast (Chow 1996). It was also during this Exclusion Era that Chinatown was forced to move from Pennsylvania Avenue for the federal beautification project in 1931, which was resisted by white residents of its current site on H Street between 5th and 7th. Like the majority of Chinese immigrants during this Exclusion Era, the original members of DC Chinatown came from rural villages in southern China, spoke Cantonese and Toishan dialect, and most of them owned or worked in Chinese laundries and restaurants. As Chow (1996) observes, reports in local English newspapers about DC Chinatown initially portrayed it as an exotic land and the people living there “hardworking, honest, and frugal” (194). But this image deteriorated over time. Chinatown became seen as “dilapidated, unclean,
and unsafe,” and Chinese Americans as “secretive, mysterious, and inscrutable” (194).

The legal ban on immigration was slightly relaxed during World War II, when the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) drew more sympathy toward the Chinese in America. This new attitude led to the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 in 1943, but the quota for Chinese immigrants remained at 105 every year. The extremely imbalanced male-to-female ratio of the Chinese population (27:1 in 1890) was also corrected after the war, when more women were allowed into the country.

However, it was not until 1965, when a new immigration act assigned a flat quota of 20,000 for each non-Western country regardless of nationality that the Chinese population in the US started to increase significantly again. The 1965 Act gives preference to two kinds of immigrants: those who are family relatives of American citizens, and those who can contribute professional skills to the US society. As Kwong (1996) observes, this preference created two groups of Chinese immigrants respectively: “Downtown Chinese,” who came to join their family and stayed in Chinatown, and “Uptown Chinese,” who came to join the mainstream work force and did not settle in Chinatown. The establishment of formal diplomatic relationship between the People’s Republic of China and the United States of America in 1979 also changed many Chinese people’s view of
America to a more favorable one and particularly attracted students who sought better graduate-level education in the USA. In addition, after the protest on Tian’anmen Square in 1989, many political dissidents also came to the United States as asylum seekers.

This new wave of immigrants after 1965 created a similar division in the Chinese community in Washington, DC. While Kwong’s characterization of these two groups of Chinese as “downtown” versus “uptown” is modeled on the geography of Manhattan, these two groups in the DC area can be referred to as “urban” versus “rural.” As Kuo and Lin (1977) report, higher education level is a more influential factor than socio-economic status in the degree of assimilation of the Chinese in Washington, DC. Many skilled workers and professionals chose to settle in the more affluent Maryland or Virginia suburbs when they arrived (Chow 1996). For example, the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Maryland drew many foreign researchers with advanced degrees, resulting in several residential communities with a high concentration of Chinese and Indian scientists and their families around Rockville, MD.

On the other hand, members of the urban Chinese population in DC Chinatown were not exclusively relatives of earlier settlers before 1965. Although it does not seem to be documented anywhere, quite a few of the elderly residents that I encountered in Chinatown came after their children, who were the post-
1965 wave of immigrants, settled down and became American citizens. Unlike earlier immigrants, who mainly came from agrarian background in southern China, many of these parents of new immigrants were retired professors, engineers, and accountants in large Chinese cities. Their English proficiency is still limited, as some of them learned Russian as the popular second language when they were in universities. Most of them also have the option of living with their children’s’ families in the suburbs, but they do not wish to be a burden on their busy lives. They chose to live in Chinatown to enjoy welfare housing, the convenience provided by Chinese stores and community organizations within walking distance, and proximity to public transportation. Because they are retired, low English proficiency is not as limiting to them as those younger newly arrived Chinese, who feel a more urgent need to learn the language and find a job. For this second wave of elderly Chinese residents, it is more of an inconvenience. Therefore, in DC Chinatown, we can observe the co-existence of two waves of Chinese immigrants in its downtown location.

This change in settlement patterns also contributes to the shift in economic structure in Chinatowns. Chinese businesses in Chinatown could no longer be sustained by the Chinese community alone and had to reach a larger market in order to survive. As its economy shifts from traditional kinds of businesses (such as the garment manufacturers in New York and the laundry businesses in
Washington, DC) to tourism, there is an increasing concern with the image and design of Chinatowns (e.g. Kwong 1996; Wilson 2006; Abramson, Manzo, and Hou 2006). I will discuss in the following section how this shift in economic priority in DC Chinatown coincides and conflicts with the revitalization project in the wider downtown area on a shorter timescale. Another change in Chinatown’s economic structure is the increasing inflow of capital from Hong Kong and Taiwan, which is mainly invested in real estate and thus has given rise to another incentive for designing the surface of the built environment.

*From “Tong Yan Gai” to “Zhong Guo Cheng”: Reflection of Political Changes in China in Chinatown’s Names*

So far, I have been mainly concerned with the history of Chinese immigration to the United States. As these changes took place over the past 120 years or so, historical events were unfolding simultaneously in the immigrants’ home country – China. Here I am only able to give a sketch of major watersheds in the modern history of China, but my main purpose in doing so is to point out the potential linkage between these historical stages in China and the changing Chinese names for Chinatown.

Although the English name “Chinatown” has stayed the same, and we can find an early instance of its usage in the 1898 article “A Trip to Chinatown”
in the *Washington Evening Star* (Figure 5.1), there are three different ways to name the place of Chinatown in Chinese: 唐人街 (*Tong Yan Gai* in Cantonese; *Tang Ren Jie* in Mandarin), 华埠 (*Wah Bo* in Cantonese; *Hua Bu* in Mandarin), and 中国城 (*Zhong Guo Cheng* in Mandarin; I have not heard this more recent name spoken in Cantonese).

![Image of a drawing of Chinatown](image)

**Figure 5.1:** An article on Chinatown in the Washington Evening Star in 1898

As Lim (1990) notes, the oldest name for Chinatown, *Tong Yan Gai*, originated in San Francisco in 1850s, when most Chinese stores concentrated on Sacramento Street. *Gai* means “street.” *Tong Yan*, literally “people of Tang,” was adopted by early Chinese settlers to refer to themselves, because they were more proud of the ancient Tang Dynasty than the Qing Dynasty at that time. Toward the end of nineteenth century, the Manchurian Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) was a
dwindling feudal empire plagued by internal corruption and foreign invasion, but the Tang Dynasty (618-907), though remote in history, was the most prosperous historical period of China. Further, as Kwong (1996) points out, historically, the Cantonese people were politically as well as geographically distant from the capital, Beijing, in northern China. Both reasons account for the adoption of the name of an ancient dynasty in place of ethnic or political labels. *Tong Yan Gai* (or *Tang Ren Jie*) is still widely used to refer to Chinatown nowadays, esp. in spoken interactions, and it is also the title of a large-scale documentary project produced by Phoenix TV, a Hong Kong-based Mandarin Chinese TV station that broadcasts via satellite to domestic Chinese and overseas Chinese audiences. From a Google Image search of Chinatown archways, I have also found one instance in which 唐人街 (*Tang Yan Gai*) was inscribed on the center banner of the archway in the Quartier Chinois in Paris (Figure 5.2).

![Tong Yan Gai on the archway in Paris](image)

*Figure 5.2: 唐人街 (Tong Yan Gai) on the archway in Paris*
The second Chinese name for Chinatown is 华埠 (Wah Bo in Cantonese, or Hua Bu in Mandarin), which literally means “Chinese port.” Wah or Hua refers to the Chinese people as an ethnicity rather than as a nationality, which would be Zhong Guo. This name seems to occur more frequently than Tang Yan Gai. I have found it on the Chinatown archways in London (Figure 5.3), Philadelphia, as well as on the sign of a community English Language Center in San Francisco. As a general observation, Wah Bo or Hua Bu also sounds more literary and official and less likely to be heard than Tang Yan Gai. But neither of them refers to China as a country.

Figure 5.3: 华埠 (Wah Bo) on London Chinatown's Archway

The third Chinese name – 中国城 (Zhong Guo Cheng) – is the one that is inscribed in gold on the center banner of the Friendship Archway in Washington, DC Chinatown (Figure 5.4). It also appeared on the archway in Liverpool, England.
Zhong Guo Cheng means “China,” and Cheng means “town” or “city.” Thus, Zhong Guo Cheng corresponds most closely to the English name of the place – Chinatown. At the same time, it does not shun the geopolitical reference to China as the two older names. One potential explanation for the adoption of this new name is that the Beijing government actually contributed to the funding of the archway’s construction. Secondly, the willingness to use this term probably also reflects that Chinese immigrants in the US are less ashamed of their home country now than they were more a century ago.

Over the past 120 years, China underwent several significant historical events, including the abolishment of the feudal empire and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, the Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945, the Civil War from 1945 to 1949 between the Kuomintang army and the Communist guerrilla, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the
catastrophic Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the economic reform in 1978, and the establishment of a formal diplomatic relationship with the United States in 1979. Despite major setbacks such as the wars and the ten years of Cultural Revolution, China’s economic power and political influence have been increasing, and there is more cultural and political exchange between China and the USA now than before. Therefore, the changing Chinese names for Chinatowns seems to also indicate a change in the attitude of at least some overseas Chinese toward their home country. During fieldwork, I have noticed a mixed-use of *Tong Yan Gai* and *Zhong Guo Cheng* among Chinese-speaking residents and community organizers. However, even Liu Bobo, who has very limited English vocabulary, often refers to Chinatown simply as “Chinatown” in English. This is, however, only a preliminary observation for now and needs to be verified through more empirical research in the future.

To summarize, the multiple historical processes and events on this timescale of a century have produced three kinds of change in DC Chinatown: the mixing of different waves of immigrants, shifting economic priority to tourism and real estate, and a closer political relationship with China. In the following section, I will turn to discuss how these historical processes on the timescale of a century flow into processes on the timescale of five decades in
downtown Washington, DC, which more directly led to the design policy of Chinatown.

CIVIL RIGHTS, DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND THE RE-MAKING OF CHINATOWN

On a shorter timescale of fifty years, two major historical and social processes (the Civil Rights Movement and Downtown Development in Washington, DC) resulted in a series of legislative and policy documents that became discursive and political resources employed to various degrees by different participants during the shop sign review process on yet a shorter timescale. The convergence of the Civil Rights Movement with the beginning of the downtown revitalization project in DC and the newer wave of Chinese immigrants discussed above on a longer timescale contributed to the publishing of Chinatown Design Guidelines Study in 1989. Various stages of the Downtown Development project in Washington, DC resulted in the making of the Comprehensive Plan in 1984, the zoning of the Downtown Development Overlay District in Municipal Regulation in 1991 (periodically revised afterwards), the creation of the Downtown Action Agenda in 2000, and the major revision of the Comprehensive Plan in 2006. Here I will focus on the producers of these documents and on how the geographic boundary and place identity of Chinatown changed over time in these regulatory

Civil Rights Movement & “Save Chinatown”

According to Lim (1991) and Chow (1996), the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 to 1968 inspired many Chinese Americans to participate in political activism. In DC Chinatown, several community organizations were formed in the 1970s to bring services to Chinatown and also to voice the community’s concern over the negative effect of new construction projects on Chinatown, particularly, the Gallery Place metro station and the proposed Convention Center.

These activities produced several successes. The protest against the proposal to build the Convention Center at 7th and H Street resulted in the relocation of the site to 9th and H Street outside the boundary of Chinatown. The construction of Wah Luck House for low-income and elderly residents (especially those affected by the Convention Center) started in 1975 and was completed in 1982. Chinese was added to street signs in 1977. And a historical photo in *Washington, DC: A Photographic Journal* (Lim 1991) shows a visible “Save Chinatown” banner hanging off the wall of a building when the Gallery Place
metro station was under construction in mid-1970s. “Chinatown” was added to the metro station’s name by hyphenation in 1982.

One of the most active participants in this array of activities is Alfred Liu, an architect, who immigrated after 1965 from northern China and who allegedly came down from New York to Washington, DC to join the effort to “save Chinatown” in the 1970s. Alfred Liu was the designer and chief architect of the Wah Luck House as well as the Friendship Archway completed in 1986. He is also the President of AEPA Architects Engineers, P.C., a local firm that was hired by the District Office of Planning to conduct the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study, published in 1989. As we will see later in Chapter 6, this policy document is a key contributor to the making of Chinatown as a ritual place, even though it did propose more substantive development projects including a mixed-use complex called East-West Center. According to Mr. Wang, this project was never carried out mainly due to lack of investment capital.

Since this document is analyzed in more detail in the following chapter, here I would like to highlight that, to use Goffman’s term (1981), the author of the document is a company headed by a Chinese architect who immigrated after 1965 (thus, “new people” in Mr. Wang’s view). Second, the making of the document received political support and financial funding from the District Government, more specifically, the Office of Planning, who can be seen as the
principal. The animator is the draftsperson and writer of the document. In adjunction with the Civil Rights Movement and heightened political awareness among Chinese Americans, another relevant process contributing to this design guideline is the downtown development over the past thirty years, which also gave rise to a number of other instrumental legislative and policy documents, albeit with very different production formats from this original document. Thus, I will now turn to discuss how these regulations and policies came about, who made them, and how they influenced the design of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape.

*From “Downtown” to “Central Washington”: 20 Years of Downtown Development*

According to the official history outlined in the 2006 Comprehensive (Section 1601), the beginning of the downtown development project can be traced back to 1972, when the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) was established to “stem Downtown’s decline” (1601.7). At this time, the center of the city had been gradually losing its residential population and consequently the market for retail businesses to the suburbs since the interstate highways were constructed in the 1950s. Office buildings also shifted from “traditional” Downtown westward to K Street and to the south side of the Mall. This so-called “traditional” Downtown covers the area east of 16th Street NW,
north of the National Mall/US Capitol complex, and south of Massachusetts Avenue. The main achievement of the PADC from 1972 to 1994 was to develop the first large modern office buildings in “traditional” Downtown.

In 1982, the Mayor’s Downtown Committee together with the Office of Planning produced “Downtown DC: Recommendations for the Downtown Plan,” which was incorporated into the first Comprehensive Plan in 1984. The 1984 Plan emphasized housing and retail development “focused on F Street, Gallery Place, Chinatown, new arts uses along 7th Street, and significant residential development at Penn Quarter and Mount Vernon Square” (2006 Comprehensive Plan 1601.9).

As development activities continued, the “Downtown Development District” was created by the Zoning Commission as an overlap district, which facilitates special municipal regulations to be applied to the defined area so as to diversify development and make mixed-use buildings a requirement. Regulations pertaining to this “Downtown Development Overlay District” can be found in the District of Columbia Municipal Regulation (DCMR), Title 11 (Zoning), Chapter 17. It was first made in 1991 and periodically updated afterwards. Section 1705 of Chapter 17 is devoted to definitions and regulations related to Chinatown (see Appendix A). In 1997, the Downtown Business Improvement District (Downtown BID) was formed, which replaced PADC. Its
main effort was to create tax legislation that increased property tax in the Downtown Overlay District, including Chinatown.

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan (1601.11) states, “the targets set in the early 1980s were finally approaching realities” by 2000. Another updated policy framework, the Downtown Action Agenda, was set by the Office of Planning in 2000.

Among this variety of policy documents and legislations, I focus on the following three documents that are especially relevant to Chinatown, listed in a chronological order of their creation:

• Section 1705 (“Chinatown”), Chapter 17 (“Downtown Development Overlay District), Title 11 (“Zoning”) of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations

• 2000 Downtown Action Agenda

• Chapter 9 (“Urban Design”) and Chapter 16 (“Central Washington Element”) in Revised 2006 Comprehensive Plan

Based on examination of these documents, four main changes in terms of linguistic and discursive features are noticed: 1) the name “Downtown” has been gradually replaced by “Central Washington”; 2) urban design gives priority to “harmonious integration” over individual neighborhood identities; 3) some parts of Chinatown have become gradually replaced by “Gallery Place/Penn Quarter”
and the boundaries of Chinatown have shrunk; 4) the place identity of Chinatown has become perceived as a problem, especially related to questions about its authenticity.

First, a noticeable change over time is the new place name “Central Washington,” defined below in Figure 5.5. Figure 5.6 illustrates its boundary.

**Figure 5.5: Definition of Central Washington Planning Area**

![Definition of Central Washington Planning Area](image)

**Figure 5.6: Boundary of Central Washington Planning Area**

![Boundary of Central Washington Planning Area](image)
As we can see, the boundary of “Central Washington” is much larger than the original downtown and emanates from the traditional core in all directions. According to the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, this broader area is not a new creation, “most residents, workers, and visitors think of Downtown in a broader sense – including areas as far north as Dupont Circle, as far west as Foggy Bottom, and as far east as Capitol Hill” (1600.4). But probably a more important motive for creating this area is stated in the third sentence of the same paragraph (Figure 5.7): “’Traditional’ Downtown is also almost completely built out.” In other words, there is little space for further development left in the original Downtown.

![Figure 5.7: Areas included in the Central Washington Area](image)

When analyzing public policy documents such as the Comprehensive Plan, an important question which Ron Scollon (2008) urges researchers to ask is: What kinds of action are enabled by discourse? In this case, creating a larger downtown area called “Central Washington” enables the extension of similar development activities to other neighborhoods and sites that were not
considered part of Downtown in the planning literature. The importance of this change in place name is clearly illustrated in one of the “action items” in the 2006 Plan (1608.23).

Figure 5.8: Changing "Downtown" to "Center City"

This action item is titled “Downtown Action Agenda Update.” But before stating specific updates that should be made, the first step listed is “Update the 2000 Downtown Action Agenda as ‘Center City Action Agenda.’ It is interesting that the verb “update” is used here instead of “change” or “revise.” According to the Oxford American English Dictionary, “update” means providing newer information about something, with the presumption that the “something” has stayed the same. But as we have seen above, the referent area of “Central Washington” is not the same as the referent area of “Downtown” at least in the planning literature, but rather it contains “Downtown.” Thus, it avoids drawing attention to the change in referent led by the change in reference.
The second noticeable change emerging from these policy documents is the emphasis on a unified image of Washington, DC. This goal is articulated in many places in the Urban Design Element of the 2006 Plan (Chapter 9), but it can be most visibly seen in the textbox on page 9-3 (Figure 5.9). Looking at it from the perspective of visual composition (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996), we can see that the purple background shading of the box and the shadow off the right edge set it apart from the rest of the text on the page. Moreover, the text inside is printed in bigger, white, and sans-serif font, which further creates a visual separation. These visual framing devices are used to highlight the most important information in many types of designed discourses. For example, textboxes are commonly used in textbooks for summaries. Through these visual contextualization cues (Scollon 2008), readers are cued to interpret the text as the most important information.
In addition to emphasizing the unity of design, another goal is to enhance the identities of individual neighborhoods. However, unlike framing device such as the textbox, this goal is not visually highlighted. A photo of Chinatown on the right margin of page 9-19 further emphasizes the priority assigned to “harmonious integration” (Figure 5.10). In contrast with the definition of Chinatown as “Downtown’s only ethnic cultural area” in the DCMR Zoning Regulation (Section 1705, Chapter 17, Title 11) created in 1991, the caption of this photo uses Chinatown as an illustration of integrated design, and “the historic setting” seems to refer to the architectural style of the old rowhouses than “ethnic cultural history.”
Third, at the same time as a “Central Washington” area was created and a unified image of the city was designed, Chinatown is, however, gradually shrinking in boundary and disappearing off the chart. In the 1991 Zoning Regulation, the territory of Chinatown is defined in terms of the following zoning squares (Figure 5.11), and a selection from Tile 10 of the Zoning Map shows the area covered by them (Figure 5.12). Comparing this legislative definition of Chinatown’s boundary with Chinatown’s boundaries in other government policy documents analyzed here, intriguing differences appear.
First, the boundary drawn in the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study (1989) (Figure 5.13) is slightly larger, drawing the southern boundary at G Street rather than G Place at half a block above, and including the eastern half of Tech World in the northwestern corner.
Second, the boundary of Chinatown, as shown in the Downtown Action Agenda (2000) and the Revised Comprehensive Plan (2006), is significantly smaller than the definition in the zoning regulation. On the map of the Downtown Action Agenda (Figure 5.14), Chinatown is reduced to about two and a half blocks of H Street. This rather dramatic territorial reduction of Chinatown is more precisely shown on Map 16.1: Central Washington Policy Focus Areas in the 2006 Plan (see Appendix B). Here I will only zoom into the section of the Chinatown area (Figure 5.15). According to the map legends, Chinatown is inside box 2.3, Gallery Place/Penn Quarter in box 2.2, and Mount Vernon District in box 2.4. Slightly inconsistent with the map in Downtown Action Agenda, Gallery Place and Penn Quarter are now considered one area, and it surrounds Chinatown on the north, west, and south sides. The northern tip of the original Chinatown boundary is also now part of Mount Vernon District, combining Mt. Vernon Square and Mt.Vernon Triangle in 2000. Therefore, as indicated in these documents, the policy boundary of Chinatown has been shrinking since 1989.
The third change in these policy documents over the past twenty years is the increasingly ambivalent portrayal of Chinatown. As mentioned previously, in the zoning regulation in 1991, which draws from the 1984 Comprehensive Plan, the first goal defines Chinatown as Downtown’s “only ethnic cultural area”
(Figure 5.16), and the action verbs prescribed are to “protect and enhance,” “maintain and expand,” “reinforce” and again “protect.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title 11</th>
<th>District of Columbia Municipal Regulations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1705</td>
<td>CHINATOWN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1705.1</td>
<td>The principal policies and objectives from the Comprehensive Plan for the Chinatown area are to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) Protect and enhance Chinatown as Downtown’s only ethnic cultural area;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Maintain and expand the existing concentration of retail uses emphasizing Chinese and Asian merchandise and related wholesale operations serving residents, visitors, tourists, and business travelers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Reinforce the area’s economic viability by encouraging mixed use developments, including substantial housing, cultural and community facilities, offices, retail and wholesale businesses, and hotels; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Protect existing housing and the most important historic buildings with suitable preservation controls, residential and commercial zones, and economic incentives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.16: Objectives to protect Chinatown set in 1991

c. In addition to being diverse, Downtown should be authentic. This should be expressed through its appreciation and celebration of its history, culture and heritage. Thus, a priority should be placed on the preservation of buildings, places and uses which express these qualities. Recent efforts to restore the former Carnegie Library Building, create farmers markets, and improve the Central Library to provide space for cultural celebrations are examples of actions which contribute to the feeling of authenticity. Chinatown presents an interesting case. While on the one hand, preserving Chinatown’s authenticity has to be about more than just preserving facades or using Chinese characters on street signs, on the other hand, there has been a marked reduction in the number of Chinese businesses. It remains to be seen if Chinatown can maintain an authentic role as the center of a dispersed Asian community. Historic preservation should be strongly promoted Downtown where the historic fabric is still largely intact, but contemporary architecture also should flourish in places where new construction is appropriate.

Figure 5.17: Chinatown’s authenticity question in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan
This preservationist stance toward Chinatown in 1984 and 1991 contrasts with an ambivalent attitude conveyed in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, articulated in the third planning and development priority of Central Washington (Figure 5.17). The three sentences about Chinatown are separately presented below.

Chinatown presents an interesting case. While on the one hand, preserving Chinatown’s authenticity has to be about more than just preserving facades or using Chinese characters on street signs, on the other hand, there has been a marked reduction in the number of Chinese businesses. It remains to be seen if Chinatown can maintain an authentic role as the center of a dispersed Asian Community.

The first sentence presents Chinatown as “an interesting case.” Together with the last sentence “it remains to be seen,” this paragraph refrains from an evaluation of whether Chinatown is at present authentic or not. The second sentence of the paragraph contrasts the preservation of facades and use of Chinese characters on street signs with the reduction of Chinese businesses by using the connective “while” and asserts with a high degree of certainty through “have to” that the mentioned preservation measures do not suffice to maintain authenticity, accentuated by the minimizer “just.” By using the gerund in “more than just preserving facades or using Chinese characters on street signs,” it is also unclear who is the doer of the action. Agency is further blurred in the second
clause of the sentence through the nominalization of the process of Chinese businesses closing doors in Chinatown as a “reduction” in number. In so doing, the question of such reduction has taken place is also avoided. More interestingly, in the final sentence of this excerpt, “Chinatown” becomes an animated figure, which is responsible for maintaining its own “authenticity.” Through these discourse strategies, no actual organization is accused of creating this “inauthentic” linguistic landscape of Chinatown, and the future of Chinatown is also left to its own fate.

Rather ironically, the Office of Planning, the government agency that composes and distributes the Comprehensive Plan, partakes, at least to some degree, in both processes contrasted here. It works with the Chinatown Steering Committee in approving signage design according to the Chinatown Design Review, and it works with other government agencies as well as commercial developers in constructing large-scale housing projects in the downtown area, including Chinatown, which have led to the rise in property value and taxes. Many Chinese businesses closed because they could not afford to stay, or because they were bought out by commercial developers, which is more profitable than running a store. Nonetheless, the responsibility for preserving Chinatown’s authenticity is assigned to Chinatown itself. This ambivalent attitude of the Office of Planning toward the future of Chinatown manifests as a
political resource that the Chinatown Steering Committee lacks when negotiating with developers over signage design.

But before I analyze the negotiation processes on a shorter timescale, I will first summarize the discussion on this timescale of fifty years. Two processes are relevant. The Civil Rights Movement raised the awareness among Chinese Americans about protecting Chinatown. With this historical process converging with the beginning of the downtown development program in the early 1980s, Alfred Liu and his company built the Wah Luck House, the Friendship Archway, and the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study, only the signage part of which could be carried out due to lack of investment capital. On the other hand, the downtown development project (which has been in full swing since 1982) has constructed many large-scale office and housing projects around Chinatown, reinforcing neighboring areas such as Penn Quarter/Gallery Place that gradually took over Chinatown’s territory. Further, the revised 2006 Comprehensive Plan assigned priority to a unified image of the city over neighborhood identity. The preservation of Chinatown through use of a “traditional design” that had been frozen in history from the early stage of downtown development and the current dwindling state of Chinatown as consequence of accomplished development goals are further synchronized on the same temporal plane. In the policy documents produced over the past twenty years, we have observed not only the
shrinking of Chinatown’s boundary over time but also the decreasing support that the Office of Planning has provided to the community. In the next section, I will discuss how these temporal changes manifest in face-to-face interactions at community meetings.

**Chinatown Design Review: The Case of AT&T’s Flagship Store Design**

As the linguistic landscape of Chinatown is the aggregate of all types of visual signage on its surface, in order to know how it took its current shape, it is necessary to know how individual shop signs were made. Although I was not able to observe the graphic designing process of the shop sign, which was commonly contracted to independent signage design companies located in other states, for example, Pennsylvania, I was able to observe the process of design review by attending several Chinatown Steering Committee monthly meetings in early 2008 and by collecting relevant document and signage designs. The design review is critical, because any new business in Chinatown has to receive approval in order to obtain a building permit. The main data that inform my analysis in this section are the fieldnotes and video recordings from two Chinatown Steering Committee meetings during which the store design of AT&T was presented, reviewed, rejected, and finally approved. Before analyzing the meetings, I will take a brief look at the User’s Guide to Chinatown Design
Review, which presents an overview of the review process in a user-friendly flowchart.


On October 2, 2007, when I was volunteering at the Chinatown Community Cultural Center, I noticed a new laminated poster board standing on top of a metal filing cabinet. The poster was displayed facing the center’s door, so it was visible to anyone entering the Center. It was entitled “User’s Guide to Chinatown Design Review” (Appendix C).

In terms of Goffman’s production format (1981), the author of this User’s Guide is the Office of Planning, as the name of the office was in larger red font in the lower right corner with the year “2007” below it. But the principal, whose interest is represented by this poster, also involves DC Regulatory & Consumer Affairs (DCRA) and the Chinatown Steering Committee (CSC), as signaled by the use of “us” in the heading - “Questions? Contact us:” also placed in a narrow vertical column (Figure 5.18). Among them, the Office of Planning plays the role of mediator between CSC and DCRA, as it receives input from the former and “sends a letter of approval” to DCRA, who ultimately issues the building permit.
The intended addressees of this document are businesses who wish to obtain building permits in order to open a store in Chinatown. Therefore, they can be considered both as the principal receiver, who “takes responsibility for ‘reading’ or responding to the communication,” and interpreter, who “provides the meaning which is attributed to the communication” (Scollon 2008, 101). The business owners’ voices were also animated by the three speech bubbles in the top part of the document, which is indicated mostly clearly in the use of the first-person possessive pronoun – “my” – in the third speech bubble (Figure 5.19).
Both the Office of Planning and Amanda, manager of CCCC, are then the handler, who “provides the actual material text of the reading in the place where principals or interpreters may act on it” (Scollon 2008, 101). According to Amanda, this poster was displayed in the Center, because its office is also the office of the Chinatown Steering Committee, one of the principals behind the document’s creation. Further, it makes important information available to a bystander or spectator like me, who “sees or reads the document but has no role in responding to it” (Scollon 2008, 101), and therefore conveys to outside observers the important role that CSC has in this process. However, in fact, as previously mentioned, CSC’s role is “to provide input to the Office of Planning,” who is the final decision maker.

Turning now from the participation framework to the resources represented in this User’s Guide, we can see that time is one of the most important resources involved in this process, as highlighted in red in Step 3 and
Step 5 of the flowchart. The process lasts from fewer than 60 days to no more than 120 days, and can be started over again if the design is not approved three months after its submission. Another important resource is the list of relevant documents provided in the right vertical column. However, the 1989 Chinatown Design Guidelines Study was absent from the list. This is thus the first disjunction between the design review process and the policy making process discussed above on a longer timescale of 50 years. Curiously though, the boundary of Chinatown indicated with the grey shading on the map corresponds to the 1989 Study rather than the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, in which Chinatown is only two and half blocks of H Street. This is the second disconnection between timescales noticed on this poster. Now I will turn to the meetings where more such temporal disjunctions were observed.

**Participant Framework during AT&T Design Review**

In August 2007, returning to the field after three months of absence, I noticed that the store located in the Gallery Place complex at the corner of 7th and H Street, right next to the archway, had changed. Before, it had housed the clothing chain United Colors of Benetton; now it was under renovations and the shop windows were completely covered with vinyl bearing the AT&T logo and the words “Opening Soon.” I learned from Amanda that indeed an AT&T
flagship store rented this prime retail space from Gallery Place, but before it could open, it had to pass the Chinatown Design Review. After the initial design was rejected by the Design Review Sub-Committee, AT&T submitted a revised design to CSC in December 2007, which was scheduled to be reviewed in the subsequent monthly CSC meeting on January 7, 2008 and further discussed on February 4. These were the two meetings that I will focus on.

Specifically, I will discuss two kinds of shift in the participant framework during these meetings. First, the author of the 1989 Chinatown Design Guidelines Study, namely Alfred Liu and his company AEPA, are not members of the CSC and do not attend these public meetings. As Mr. Wang mentioned once, Alfred Liu was one of the “new” people when he came to Chinatown, whereas the founders and the key members of CSC were from families that had been in Chinatown for many years before the 1965 Immigration Act. Thus, the author of this policy that proposed bilingual signage as a measure to preserve Chinatown is not the principal who implements it now.

This further contributes to the unfamiliarity with the document especially among the new members of CSC. For example, during the February 4 meeting, when Ted, who represented the Office of Planning, mentioned the 1989 study, Amy, a Chinese lady in her fifties who immigrated from Hong Kong and has lived in suburban Maryland, complained about the document not having been
made available to the Committee. At that point, Mr. Wang and a few other older committee members corrected her that they all received a copy when it was first published in 1989. Amy apologized and explained, “I’m new here. I don’t know.”

The second change in participant framework took place between the two meetings, when the Office of Planning representative, Ted, switched from the mediator role as represented in the User’s Guide to speak on behalf of the applicant. During the first meeting, the design of AT&T was presented by two higher-level employees from Akridge, the development corporation that owns the Gallery Place complex. In other words, AT&T’s design proposal was animated by their landlord. Ted’s role was mainly to introduce the presenters and he prefaced their presentation by explaining the grounds on which the Office of Planning together with the Design Review Sub-committee rejected the first design, which did not satisfy the review requirements except for the banners. Akridge representatives then presented the revision, made by a company located in Pennsylvania, and argued for their case. However, the revision, including the initially approved banners, was rejected by the full Committee.

During the February meeting, however, even Akridge representatives did not attend the meeting. The second revision was presented instead by Ted, who
urged the Committee to join him “in the effort to expedite the process.” After much deliberation over which translation was most appropriate, Ted said:

We’d like you to recommend one person from your group to advise us regarding Chinese interpretations in future applications. We really want to kinda fine tune that a little bit. At least one designated person, coz we have a lot of different interpretations from different members, coz we spent about a month just on the characters. … The thing is that their new store is a new concept, a flagship store. They’ll have very nice animated video like Apple. Upscale. It’ll be a very upscale store, the concept of a new store. Chinese characters don’t work with that new store concept well.

His complaint about the time-consuming process of design renewal pointed again to time as a precious resource. Most interestingly, his last comment positioning Chinese orthography in opposition to a new concept, can be seen as reversed synchronization, it may be called diachronization. In other words, despite the continued use of the Chinese writing system in our contemporary world, it was historicized as an old feature that detracts from the new design. Toward the end of the meeting, Ted’s role was questioned by a more outspoken committee member, who asked, “Why are they (Akridge and AT&T) not here today?”
Ted’s shifted position, to some degree, parallels the change in planning policies over the past twenty years as we have seen in the previous section, when the District government shifted planning priority to the material development of urban neighborhoods. This change in participant framework, on the other hand, can also be seen as a loss of political resource for the Chinatown Steering Committee. This observation was further confirmed when a long-term committee member nostalgically recalled, “The old director of Office of Planning was really nice to us, but he retired a long time ago.”

**Distribution of Communicative Resources during AT&T Design Review**

Linguistic and communicative resources were also unequally distributed during these two meetings. First, all these meetings were conducted in English, and the presentation was delivered in a format that did not seem familiar to the older members of the committee, both of which prevented them from participating more actively during the meeting. Second, none of the second-generation Chinese American members of the committee were able to read or write Chinese, even though they were all conversationally fluent in Mandarin and some in Cantonese as well.
During the presentations at these meetings, most members of the Committee were listening quietly, and if there was a problem or questions, they tended to talk among themselves on the side rather than with the presenter. On January 7 when the AT&T store design was first presented, AT&T’s slogan “Your world delivered” was translated into Chinese as “您的世界被交付” (Figure 5.20). When the banner appeared on the projection screen in front of the Committee, I could see and hear a quiet unease among the older members. I saw the puzzled expression on their face and overheard two of them whispering to each other how bad the translation was. There are several issues with “您的世界被交付” (nin de shijie bei jiaofu; “your world BE in the custody of”). First, rather obviously, jiaofu does not mean “deliver.” Also grammatically, the passive construction bei
is only used with undesirable actions, as in wode zixingche bei tou le (“my bicycle was stolen”). Finally, if the agent of action (i.e. AT&T) has to be elided as in the English slogan “Your world delivered,” it will have to come before the object -- nin de shijie. Despite the audience’s awareness of this unacceptable translation, they did not raise the issue. Before the presentation moved onto the next slide, Cyndi, one of the Akridge representatives, interjected to call the audience’s attention to the dragon on the top of the banner.

Since I was an observer, I was waiting to see if anyone would raise the question about the translation. Sadly, nobody did. I raised my hand when Ted asked if anybody had any question about the presentation. Many in the audience echoed my critique of the translation. Amy added that the translation sounded to her like a will, “very unlucky.” Then, another man pointed out that even the dragon lacked a tail, was incomplete, and thus was also inauspicious. At that point during the January meeting, the complete proposal including the banners was rejected. Once the meeting was over, more outrage and disbelief were expressed among the older members of the committee in their familiar tongue – Chinese. At the same time, many of the second generation Chinese Americans in the Committee joked with each other about their own lack of Chinese literacy. One of them was holding a Chinese newspaper in his hands, and Amanda teased him, “I didn’t know you could read Chinese!” He explained, “It’s for my dad.”
Rather ironically, the Design Review Sub-committee of CSC, which functions as the first gatekeeper in the review process, consists of these younger Chinese Americans, the sons and daughters of founders of the CSC.

Despite the unanimous rejection during the first meeting, the same translation appeared on the presentation slide during the second meeting, where Ted pushed for the timely approval of the design. In the end, CSC compromised, and Mr. Wang wrote to the Office of Planning to grant their approval.

In short, the User’s Guide to Chinatown Design Review and these two meetings discussing AT&T’s shop signs provided a window into how the signage on individual stores, esp. the newer non-Chinese businesses, came about. It requires time, linguistic resources, and political connections. Except for time, which was a scarce resource for the businesses as any delay in opening means reduction in profit, I have found that the shifting participant framework and the distribution of linguistic resources are more favorable toward the businesses rather than the Chinese Steering Committee. More importantly, this inequality was a consequence of the disconnection between the design review process and other socio-historical processes discussed on longer timescales.
In this chapter, I have attempted to untangle the multiple historical, social, and interactional trajectories that have contributed to the production of the linguistic landscape of Chinatown. In order to discern these processes, I used the system of timescales (Lemke 2000) as a heuristic guide. Borrowing from nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004) as well as mediated discourse analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2001), I paid special attention to the participants (social actors), the linguistic and material resources (mediational means), and the discourses about Chinatown (mediated discourse) when analyzing each process.

What I have found are simultaneous changes in these processes and an array of disjunctions among these timescales. On the timescale of a century, Chinatowns in general have changed due to new waves of immigration and their preference to settle outside Chinatown, especially in the suburbs, due to shifting economic priorities, as well as due to political changes in China. When these processes converge with the beginning of urban revitalization in Washington, DC in the early 1980s, they led to the production of the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study in 1989. However, this process then diverged from the main course of development activities, because of a lack of investment capital, while many other real-estate projects were built around the core of Chinatown, gradually taking over the material space once inside its boundary. This change
was clearly reflected in the document as the receding boundary line of Chinatown. Finally, the generational gap among Chinese Americans, lost economic and political resources, and attempt at redefining Chinatown in the place name as well as in the textual discourse constructing its identity all become manifest and relevant during the micro-process of reviewing an individual store’s signage design. Taken together, this analysis of multiple timescales accounts for the temporal aspect of Chinatown as heterotopia. In the next chapter, I will turn to look at the spatial context of linguistic landscape and analyze how multiple spaces are juxtaposed.
CHAPTER SIX

SITUATING LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN SPACE

In the preceding chapters, I have conceptualized (Chapter 2) and analyzed (Chapter 4 & 5) Chinatown’s linguistic landscape as text. By attending to the subtle differences and divisions in the shop signs’ geosemiotic characteristics, we have seen that the linguistic landscape of Chinatown has become a kind of spatial representation, which, although intended to give Chinatown a uniform surface design conforming to traditional Chinese aesthetics that is detached from local history, has given rise to a heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]), a hybrid place that blends multiple times and spaces. Chapter 5 discerns how multiple timescales are connected and disconnected in the process of producing Chinatown’s linguistic landscape. This chapter turns to examine the juxtaposition of social spaces and places in this heterotopia.

As mentioned at the beginning of the introductory chapter, Washington, DC Chinatown is often perceived as “fake,” “a gimmick,” in other words, a hollow symbolic shell with “no Chinese people living in it.” The question I attempt to answer in this chapter is how its bilingual linguistic landscape has contributed to this inauthentic image of Washington, DC Chinatown. By
answering this question, I also intend to discover what an “authentic” Chinatown entails.

In order to address this question, I take Scollon and Scollon (2003)’s geosemiotic framework and expand it both internally with the idea of a polycentric neighborhood (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005 a & b) and externally with the idea of spatial network and flow (Deleuze and Guattari 1980; Jensen 2005).

First, Washington, DC Chinatown is conceived as a geosemiotic aggregate (Scollon and Scollon 2003), composed of public discourse that wraps around a three-dimensional cube, interaction order (Goffman 1983) which is the pattern of social interaction inside the cube, and the material and physical environment which are the cube’s supporting beams. In this geosemiotic aggregate, Chinatown’s linguistic landscape is part of the wrapping spatial representation and interacts with other components of the aggregate, namely spatial practice and material place.

Then, I look inside the aggregate through the lens of polycentricity (Blommaert, Collins, Slembrouck 2005 a & b) and multilocality (Rodman 1992), within the boundary of this multilingual neighborhood in order to discern activity spaces that are constituted by individuals’ spatial practices (e.g. Jones 2008) and shaped by senses of place (e.g. Feld and Basso 1996; Rose 1996).
Finally, I examine how this geosemiotic aggregate is discursively aligned with or against other places on various spatial scales: specifically, China and United States on the scale of nation-state, Washington, DC on the scale of city, and other American Chinatowns on the scale of neighborhood.

What emerged from this analysis of the spatial context of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape is a sharp contrast between ritual and lived place, contestation between ritual place and material space, alignment against other American Chinatowns, and finally (re)alignment with China. I will now turn to discuss these findings in more detail in the following sections respectively.

**Contrast between Ritual Place and Lived Place**

Through a close examination of the three aspects (representation, practice, and materiality) of Washington, DC Chinatown as geosemiotic aggregate, the first noticeable finding is the contrast between ritual and lived place.

The idea of ritual place originated from the history of architecture (e.g. the design of Gothic cathedrals in Panofsky 1976 [1951] as introduced in Hanks 2005; the production of medieval monuments in Lefebvre 1991, who uses the similar term monumental space instead). Erwin Panofsky, an influential art historian, argues that ritual space created by the architectural design of an era runs parallel to the way of thinking of the same time. For example, in the Gothic era “the
transparency principle that governed architectural design as clarity governed scholastic thought” (Hanks 2005, 71). Also according to Hanks, Bourdieu (1974 [1967]) then extends Panofsky’s theory by adding that this linkage between design and mind takes place through everyday practices. For example, the division of physical spaces in the Berber house between women and men reproduces gender relations in the social structure through the social actors’ embodiment of the house’s material structure in everyday activities. Bourdieu’s emphasis on practice is seen by anthropologists of space and place as an important contribution that lifts the field beyond the structuralist paradigm (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). Further, as shown in Hanks’s summative table (2005, 71), this shift is also a contrast between ritual space and lived space, which is manifest in Washington, DC Chinatown. In an effort to make terminology consistent in this dissertation, I will follow humanist geographers’ usage and replace “space” with “place” in these two terms, as they both refer to locality imbued with meaning. It is also important to note here that it might seem at first to the reader that the difference between these two kinds of place is the same difference between spatial representation and practice. However, as we will see in the following analysis of Chinatown, both ritual place and lived place involve all three aspects of spatial production.
What makes Chinatown as a ritual place? To answer this question, I apply Lefebvre’s discussion of the monumental space (1991) to photos, fieldnotes, and the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study (AEPA 1989) and identified the following three ways in which spatial representation, practice, and materiality together contribute to the monumentality of Chinatown.

First, even though Chinatown itself emerged as a place for newly arrived immigrants to live and conduct business at the end of the nineteenth century, the re-design of Chinatown in the late 1980s aimed to create an image, or in Lefebvre’s words, “to be read and grasped” rather than “to be lived” (1991, p. 143).

Figure 6.1 shows a snapshot of a list of five design objectives as outlined in the Chinatown Design Guideline Study. The first, second and last objectives on the
list emphasize how Chinatown should be perceived, whereas objectives no. 3 and 4 are concerned with how Chinatown should be lived. But as we can see now, twenty years after the Study was published, only objectives emphasizing design appeal have been partially met. While Chinatown does seem to have more nightlife now (Objective No.3), it is more likely due to other new, non-Chinese establishments in the area than to Chinatown itself. Chinatown is also hardly a family place (Objective No. 4). The condominium buildings have indeed attracted young professionals. Average family income in Census Tract 58, whose boundary comes closest to Chinatown, has increased 261%, from $24,482 in 1989 to $88,452 in 1999, representing the sharpest increase among all census tracts in the District (NeighborhoodInfo DC 2008). But the percentage of children in the neighborhood is only at 7.2%, compared with the 20% District average.

Objectives 1, 2, 5, however, have been met partially through the implementation of the design guideline. Three “must-see items” listed in Objective 1 are the “Friendship Archway,” “Tall, magnificent Chinese Street lamps along H Street,” and “A Chinese theme for the Chinatown Park” (AEPA 1989, p. 21). The archway (Figure 6.2 below) is the largest single-span Chinese archway in the World and putting “Washington, DC Chinatown into The Guinness Book of World Records (AEPA 1989, 21). The objective was to make the other “must-see” items similarly “spectacular and appealing.” The second
“must-see” item, the Chinese Street lamps, has also been installed, as shown in Figure 6.3 below.

Figure 6.2: Friendship Archway in Washington, DC Chinatown, viewed from H Street

Figure 6.3: Street lamp in Chinatown
However, in the size and color of a regular street lamp added with Chinese design elements, they seem to be rather different from what the designers envisioned in 1989:

Tall street lamps in the form of colorful, magnificent Chinese lanterns will complement and extend the Archway’s impact and create a striking perspective from the steps of the Convention Center through the Archway to Massachusetts Avenue. The brilliant, colorful lights will be a new landmark, visible from the air to those flying into National Airport at night. In addition, the bright lights will help to create a safe, inviting environment for those visiting the area after dark. (AEPA 1989, 21)

Here again, the aesthetic appeal of street lamps was given a higher priority than their practical functions of lighting the streets after dark. As for the third “must-see” item, the Chinatown Park, it was never built and is still “an empty triangle” (AEPA 1989, 21).

Objective No. 2 – Chinese astrological symbols carved on the sidewalk bricks – was also realized and was an additional feature “to be read”: “People will come not just to see Chinatown, but also to find out something about themselves. What sign were they born in? What does it mean? (AEPA 1989, 22; emphasis mine). Similarly, objective No. 5 – “Chinatown should be a place of excellent examples of Chinese architecture” – was also proposed to create an image. It states: “As an architectural showplace, Chinatown will create pride for
D.C. and will generate publicity – from all the media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, and television” (AEPA 1989, 22).

By examining the above design objectives, my intention is not to evaluate the effectiveness of the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study but rather to show that the main aim of this proposed new design of Chinatown was to create a ritual place instead of a lived place. This emphasis on appearance is closely related to the second aspect of monumentality.

According to Lefebvre, “Monumental space offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage. It thus constitutes a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one.” However, it is less clear whose image this “collective mirror” reflects in Chinatown. Alfred Liu, the architect who designed the arch, said the arch was representative of the architecture style of the Ming and Qing dynasties and pointed out that gold used to be the privilege of the emperor (Wheeler 1986). In the message preceding the preface of the Study, Fred L. Greene, Director of the Office of Planning in 1989, expressed gratitude to “not only the consultant, AEPA, but also the Chinatown community through the Chinatown Steering Committee.” Further, in the Preface, it states the overall goal of the study is that ”the criteria and guidelines suggested herein will help to create an enhanced Chinatown with a strong Chinese character” (AEPA 1989, Preface; emphasis mine). Thus, the underlying
assumption is that “Chinatown’s design should represent [the] Chinese,” which is often contested by other Asian Americans. Then, when explaining why “Chinatown should be a place of excellent examples of Chinese architecture,” the study says, “It will help position D.C. to attract welcome interest and capital from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the rest of Asia” (22). Here, the beneficiary of the renovated design is D.C. The archway was hailed by Marion Barry, DC mayor at the time of the construction, as “a visual symbol of the cultural and economic exchanges which will be part of our sister-city (Beijing and Washington, DC) agreement” (quoted in Wheeler 1986) and “a symbol of a living downtown” (quoted in Sherwood, 1986). Therefore, it seems that at least two groups’ “social visage” is represented by the proposed design with reinforced Chinese characteristics. This leads me to the next aspect of monumental space.

The third feature of monuments is illusionary and deceptive in its production and resources. Its existence “implies its construction by an urban group which may also be either free or subordinate to a (political) authority” (Lefebvre 1991, 115) and involves massive material resources (158). The brightly colored four-story architecture (as shown in Figure 6.1) is decorated by 270 ceramic dragons in gold coating, and its peaked roof is covered by 7,000 glazed gold tiles. This $1 million project involving 16 artists from China was completed in 1986. The cost was co-paid by the District government and the
municipal government of Beijing. This collaboration between the capital cities of the United States and the People’s Republic of China initially triggered strong opposition from some members of the overseas Chinese community in the DC area that has opposing political interests. Further, the employment of massive material, political, and human resources in building monuments also entails high cost for their maintenance. In August 2008, the DC Office of Planning, Office of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, and the District Department of Transportation co-organized a meeting a walk-through with the archway’s architect, Alfred Liu, to inspect its current conditions and discuss potential solutions. As Figure 6.4 shows, the blue paint on the pillars of the archway is peeling off. According to the Department of Transportation, one of the glazed gold tiles fell off one day but fortunately nobody was injured by it. Although these stakeholders agree that the archway’s condition is deteriorating and it is a potential safety hazard, they did not come to a consensus as to who will pay for the necessary repair and renovation. One thing was rather clear, the DC Government is unwilling to finance this project, and now it depends on the Chinese government, which presumably has more money now, to maintain the archway. However, the complex production process and material resources involved in the production of monuments such as the archway is usually hidden by its spectacular surface. As Lefebvre (1991) argues, “monumental buildings mask the will to power and
the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought” (143).

Finally, this collective image on the surface of ritual space also gives rise to multiple readings and meanings, which vary depending on how the ritual space is lived. As Lefebvre (1991) puts it, “it (a monumental work), has a horizon of meaning: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore, by means of – and for the sake of – a particular action” (222). Because I will discuss Chinatown as lived place separately in the section to follow, here I will focus on the spatial practices that foreground the monumentality of the space of Chinatown, namely, celebration of festivals and tourist behaviors.

Figure 6.4: Paint peeling off the archway beam
Chinatown as Ritual Place: Chinese New Year Parades

On the cover of the *Chinatown Design Guidelines Study* (Figure 6.5), a black and white line drawing depicts a parade holding and waving a long Chinese dragon heading toward the archway along H Street. In reality, this scene occurs once or twice a year, when Chinese New Year is celebrated every winter (Figure 6.6), and when the Chinese Cultural Festival is held on a less regular basis.

Figure 6.5: Line drawing of dragon dance on the cover of *Chinatown Design Guidelines Study*
On these annual occasions, normal spatial practices in Chinatown are suspended. Every Chinese Lunar New Year, thousands of visitors, including tourists and residents of the greater Washington, DC area, come into Chinatown. On February 18, 2007, hours before the parade was scheduled to start, three to four police cars parked at the intersection of H and 7th Streets below the archway to block vehicle traffic, and yellow plastic police lines taped off the roads (Figure 6.7). Also shown in this photo, vendors of festivity accessories (e.g. colorful plastic horns) and souvenirs (e.g. Washington Redskin caps) had set up their stands before the mass of tourists came in. Despite the cold weather, quite a few
eager spectators were already taking the best viewing spots alongside H Street and 7th Street. With a woman occupying an advantageous position, her husband went away with their baby in a trolley, “I’m going around to get my Chinatown experience.”

Figure 6.7: Yellow police line and street vendor before 2007 Chinese New Year Parade

The parade itself, lasting about an hour and culminating in the lighting of a long string of firecrackers hanging off a construction crane, can be seen as a platform event, a type of interaction orders outlined by Goffman (1983). As illustrated in Figure 6.8 below, most spectators (except for the two kids sitting on the snow) were standing on the sidewalks with family or friends, and thus formed many withs. However, since there were a lot of people, there was little space separating these with units (Goffman 1983), and brief interactions were more likely to take place across group boundaries than in a less crowded space. For example, strangers inquired of each other about the exact time when the
parade was going to start and proceed to this part of the street, or remarked about the performance. Their bodies were mostly oriented toward the street and turned when they were talking to each other. Cameras and camcorders were standard sign equipment that made up the personal front of many of them (Goffman 1959), so that they were ready to record once the parade came closer. Everyone’s attention was on the parade when the performers passed by. So busy with recording the festive moment on their cameras, some did not have time to turn their heads when exchanging comments and praises. During the parade, many of the stores and restaurants were still open, but regular shopping and dining activities were not commonly observed. Sometimes, even the shop windows became a vantage point for watching the parade (Figure 6.9). Once the parade was over, the crowds dispersed in all directions, into restaurants and stores, to the parking lot, or to the Metro Station.

Figure 6.8: Spectator on 7th Street during 2007 Chinese New Year Parade
A smaller platform event was simultaneously staged inside the Chinatown Community Cultural Center, a second-floor suite in the newly opened Gallery Place building. Many visitors came in to the Center because it was too cold or they needed to use the restrooms. Center staffs were greeting visitors at the door with "xinnianhao" ("happy new year"), teaching them how to say the phrase in Chinese, and passing out red envelops (each with a quarter) to children. In the main activity room, visitors were seated around the rooms, watching DC public high school students performing skits of their Chinese lessons and fan dance, African American children performing Taiji, and a traditional Chinese music band performing Cantonese songs. In the hallway, Mr. Lau, a local Chinese newspaper reporter, wrote down American visitors’ new Chinese names on slips of red paper with Chinese calligraphy brush and ink.
while volunteers helped young visitors make Chinese paper lanterns at the crafts table.

Although it might not be transparent to an outside observer, these platform events are also imbued with political meanings. The parade outside on the street is organized by the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA, or *Hua Shang Hui* in Chinese), whose political and economic interests have increasingly diverged from the Chinatown Steering Committee (CSC) and Chinatown Community Cultural Center (CCCC), organizers of the celebratory events inside. While CBA is in support of Taiwan as an independent nation-state from the People’s Republic of China, the political stance of CSC and CCCC is ambiguous or “neutral” in Mr. Wang’s words, reflected in their reception of gifts and books from both the Chinese Embassy and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (Taiwan’s diplomatic outpost) in the United States. During both parades in 2007 and 2008 that I observed, CBA organizers decorated the temporary stage and the streets with flags of the Republic of China (Figure 6.10) and passed out free waving flags to visitors. As a result, in contrast to the abundance of Taiwan and American flags, the national flags of the People’s Republic of China were completely absent from the celebratory scene.
Mr. Wang, mayor of Chinatown and the CSC chair, did not approve the act of decorating the celebration of a traditional festival shared by ethnically Chinese people over the world with political symbols. When I met Mr. Wang for the first time on this day of New Year Celebration in 2007, without me even asking about the flags, he said:

We Chinese should unite, and should not make it more complicated among ourselves. Since we are in the US, let’s just be Americans, even though our heart is in China. We have already told them not to hang Kuo Min Tang flags (the Taiwan flags). That is not good at all, too political.

Thus, while the parade organizers saw the celebration as an opportunity to advance political goals, Mr. Wang looked at it as a celebration of ethnic tradition. These two different readings of Chinatown as a ritual place are ultimately conditioned by different political stances.

In addition to Chinese politics, American politics also played a part in the parades. As shown in Figure 6.11 and 6.12 below, right before the primary election in 2008, supporters of Barack Obama joined the parades, holding banners saying “Asian Americans for Obama” and chanting his name. Hillary Clinton supporters, though not part of the official parade, held signs and walked around in the spectator crowds. Here, Chinatown became associated with not only Chinese but also all Asian Americans, a considerably larger but also more heterogeneous ethnic group.
Figure 6.11: Obama supporters at 2008 Chinese New Year Parade

Figure 6.12: Hillary supporters at 2008 Chinese New Year Parade
Thus, the above discussion demonstrates how different meanings of the ritual place of Chinatown were activated through various celebratory practices. Next I will turn to examine the everyday practices of tourists.

*Chinatown as Ritual Place: Tourist Gaze*

John Urry (2005) argues that central to a visitor’s experience of place is the consumption of an abstract, visual image of the destination. The nature of monumental space as something to be read is thus most clearly manifest in the gaze of the tourists, mediated by camera or not. Undeniably, the Friendship Archway is the most eye-catching architecture in Washington, DC Chinatown. Naturally, it also serves as the most popular background to tourist photographs. When I was waiting for one of my interviewees, Yan Ayi, at the corner of 7th and H Street on a sunny day in May 2007, I observed at least three separate pairs of tourists taking a picture of the archway in a ten minute time period. First, two young girls turned around the corner. When one of them saw the archway, she exclaimed, “Whoa!” and touched the other’s elbow to ask her to look at the arch. The second girl looked up, wowed as well, and they both lifted up their cameras. Then, a middle-aged Cantonese-speaking couple walked up to me and asked me in English if I could take a picture of them with the archway behind them. On another street corner across the street, a man set up his professional camera on a
tripod and carefully pressed the button. Tourist photography such as these literally turns this monument of Chinatown into a visual text, which can be considered as a process of resemiotization (Iedema 2001), albeit in the reverse direction to the process of materially constructing the archway based on architectural blueprint.

![Figure 6.13: Julie Koo taking picture of tourist with archway as background](image)

The photo in Figure 6.13 above illustrates this pervasive tourist spatial practice in Chinatown. There are two especially interesting points of this particular instance. First, the tourists asked Julie Koo, the Director of the Mayor’s Office of Asian Pacific Islanders, who happened to walk by to attend a community event, to take the picture of them with the archway as the background. But we can also see that there were two African American women
standing on the sidewalk waiting for their bus. Did the tourists choose to ask Julie because she was Asian (Korean in fact), adding to authenticity of their experience of Chinatown? I can only speculate. The second interesting thing was the shopping bag that one of the visitors was holding. It is from Urban Outfitters, a fashionable clothing retail chain that has a store in Chinatown, steps away around the corner from where the picture was taken. As Urry (2005) notes, second to the tourist gaze, another prevailing part of the modern tourist experience is what he calls “situated consumption in specific place” (23), referring to the purchase of souvenirs and products that are an integral part of the identity of the destination. An example would be buying a bottle of Dijon mustard in Dijon, France. However, what we see from this particular interaction is not this kind of “situated consumption.” The commodity, in this case, trendy clothes, purchased by the tourist has little to do with the ritual image of Chinatown as created in festivals as well as the very act of taking pictures of him and his friend with the archway. Therefore, that this example illustrates how Washington, DC Chinatown has been thoroughly monumentalized or ritualized.

To summarize, in this section, I have examined how the ritual place of Chinatown is created by the amalgamation of spatial representation, i.e. the Chinatown Design Guideline Study and national flags, material space, i.e. the archway, and spatial practices, i.e. celebratory events and tourist photographic
practices. I would like to suggest that Chinatown’s bilingual linguistic landscape fits well in this monumental space, because Chinese characters were also part of the design measures outlined in the Study to create a social visage for Chinatown, and because it also involves political, economic and, in addition, linguistic resources, and finally because it is also made “to be read” rather than “to be lived.” All together, this ritual image of Chinatown contrasts sharply with it as a lived place.

_Chitatown as Lived Place: Polycentric Multilingual Neighborhood_

Against the backdrop of the ritual place of Chinatown as outlined above, many people observing from the outside wonder if there are still any Chinese people living there, as visitors often do not see any Chinese people, as they would in other Chinatowns. On this basis, many think Washington, DC Chinatown is rather fake. In other words, the ritual place alone does not make Chinatown inauthentic yet, but it is the seeming absence of its lived aspect in contrast with its glamorous surface that leads to the negative interpretation. However, what I have found through ethnographic observations and interviews including map drawing tasks is that there are indeed Chinese people living in Chinatown, but their activity spaces do not overlap much with those of the visitors, or the office workers, or even the community leaders. These different kinds of activity spaces
are partly attributed to linguistic barriers but are also shaped by these social actors’ different senses of place. In this section, I will first give an overall description of the polycentric organization of this multilingual neighborhood (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005 a & b). Then, I discuss four case studies in which maps drawn by participants reflect the spaces of their everyday practices in and around Chinatown. Finally, drawing from participant observations and interview data, I explain how various senses of place also contribute to the divergent activity spaces as represented in these maps. Polycentricity is a term that Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005 a & b) have used to describe the existence of multiple centers of interaction in an urban multilingual immigrant neighborhood in Belgium. The necessity of this term suggests that today’s urban neighborhood is rarely homogeneous; rather it is composed of multiple centers of interaction regulated by different norms of interaction. While they focused on the linguistic varieties used in each center of interaction, I will add Goffman’s interaction order (1983) to the set of interactive norms.

The main centers of social interaction in Chinatown are: 1) Chinese restaurants, e.g. Chinatown Express; 2) non-Chinese restaurants and shops, e.g. Starbucks; 3) community centers, including CCCC, the Chinese Community Church, and the Senior Citizens Center; 4) low-income residential building, e.g.
Wah Luck House; 5) mega sports arena and entertainment center, i.e. Verizon Center; and 6) street intersection at H and 7th, including the archway and one of the metro station - Gallery Place-Chinatown - exits. Although bilingual signs are seen on the exterior of each of these spaces, language choice in them is largely either English or Chinese, with each of them, of course, including vast varieties. Among the abovementioned centers, Chinese could be heard as a part of regular social interactions only in the Wah Luck House and community centers.

In both Chinese and non-Chinese restaurants and stores, English is heard most of the time, as the primary clientele of Chinese restaurants are office workers in the downtown area during the day on weekdays (nearly 200,000 daytime population according to Downtown BID’s 2006 annual report), event goers at the Verizon Center at night on weekdays or on weekends, and tourists from other parts of the United States or other countries. One difference between them is that in most Chinese restaurants, menus are bilingual, whereas in non-Chinese restaurants, such as Clyde’s, Chipotle, and Starbucks, menus were in English. Another difference is in the interaction order. Many non-Chinese restaurants in the area offer takeout options, especially suitable for office workers who have limited time for lunch. As a consequence, long lines are common in these restaurants, as illustrated in Figure 6.14. One day during lunchtime, I noticed that the line in Chipotle became so long that it formed a full circle inside
the restaurant. While customers are waiting in line, they study the menu, usually installed on the wall behind the counter where food or beverage were prepared or in the form of flyers. Ingredients of an item, such as a Greek salad, are typically described below the item title, so once it is their turn, customers order the item(s) they have in mind without too much hesitation, and talk other than the order is rare between customers and cashiers. The process usually moves at an extremely fast pace in order to keep the line manageable. Although the exact sequence of ordering steps might vary from restaurant to restaurant, this is a fairly standard interaction order in non-Chinese restaurants such as Clyde’s, Chop’t Creative Salad Company, Fuddruckers, and Potbelly. If the customers chose to dine in, they focused on their food and or talking to their colleagues and friends, and rarely pay attention to the interior decoration of the restaurants.

Figure 6.14: Line at Dunkin Donuts in Chinatown
Most of the Chinese restaurants, however, are for dining in and served by waiters and waitresses. Chinatown Express, a restaurant on the corner of 6th and H Streets renowned for its handmade noodles, has four regions of service. First, the back region of the kitchen is of course for staff only, and is separated from the front region of the restaurant by a swing door (cf. Goffman 1959). Staff wear uniform red polo t-shirts and black pants. Half of them are Chinese, and the other half Hispanic. The only people coming out of the back region who do not wear the uniform outfit are the owner and his wife. Like many other Chinese restaurants, they also take orders, deliver dishes, or even bus the table, especially during busy time. In the front region of Chinatown Express, there are three sections, the section with tables for dining in, the section right before the cashier near the entrance, where sometimes people wait for takeouts, and finally the section behind the window in which the chef makes noodles from flour by hand. Naturally, each of these sections of the front region still has its own interaction order. In the dine-in section, each small square table seats two to four people. Two opposite walls are covered with mirrors, a fairly standard fixture in Chinese restaurants across American to make the space feel more spacious. High up on the mirror walls hang neon colored slips of paper with names of dishes, such as kungpao chicken, and chef’s recommendations, written vertically in Chinese. Lower on the walls are laminated newspaper articles that feature famous dishes.
at Chinatown Express, placed at the eye level of seated customers, which were inserted into the metal rim of the mirror. On the day of my observation at the restaurant (September 17, 2007), there were five white American couples or groups in the dine-in section when I went in. Although there were laminated single-page, double-sided bilingual menus on the table, many of them removed the newspaper articles from the mirror wall, read the newspaper feature, and placed their orders according to the review. In contrast to the steamed dumplings and stir-fried vegetable on my table, there were a great variety of dishes on theirs. Their orders were placed in English. Since it was a Sunday, there was nobody waiting in front of the cashier for takeouts. In this second section of the front region, the hostess, who is the restaurant owner’s wife, greeted customers. When I entered the restaurant, she asked me in English, “How many?” I replied in Mandarin Chinese, “Jiu yige (Just one).” Afterwards, when she took my order, she switched to Mandarin Chinese. In the most outward section of the front region is the noodle master in a white chef’s outfit shaking lumps of flour into fine strands of noodle. This food making process is separate from the back region of the kitchen and located right behind the glass window opening toward the street. It has become a quite popular attraction in Chinatown. Almost every first-time visitor to Chinatown will stop in front of the
window and watch the master performing the noodle “magic” inside (Figure 6.15).

Figure 6.15: Family watching chef making noodle by hand at Chinatown Express

It should be noted here that not all Chinese restaurants have the exact same interaction orders as in Chinatown Express. Tony Cheng’s restaurant, for example, is regarded as the most upscale. Their tables are round, made of hard wood, and covered with white cloths; their waiters and waitresses wear white shirts with tuxedo vests. However, there is still a general difference between Chinese and non-Chinese restaurants in terms of interaction order. This difference is attributed by one of my interviewees, Mark, who works in a government office located on 7th Street, as the reason why non-Chinese restaurants are in general more popular than Chinese restaurants during
lunchtime. He said that as people are usually on the run for lunch, they would like to eat something that they are familiar with already, like a sandwich, and do not prefer spending time trying out novel food. However, only Chinatown Express has a takeout option and in a much less desirable quality than the food offered in their dine-in section. It is thus not surprising that, despite the extremely low price Chinese restaurants advise for lunch, e.g. $4.95 at Taishan Restaurant, they are much less busy than non-Chinese restaurants around noon.

Like non-Chinese restaurants, other centers of interaction in Chinatown are also largely English-speaking. This has caused much inconvenience for Chinese residents of Chinatown with limited English proficiency. On March 9, 2007, a Chinese elder, Mr. Chen, came into CCCC for help with translating several letters. In addition, he needed help with correcting a prescription mistake at the CVS pharmacy right across the street. Since Amanda, the manager of CCCC, could not leave the Center during the day, I offered to go with him. On our way there, I asked him if there was a Chinese-speaking pharmacist at this CVS. He told me that sometimes there was a Chinese-speaking pharmacist but not always. Inside CVS, the two pharmacists working were both African American. Mr. Chen took out his pill bottles and told them about the mistake with his prescription in Chinese, but they did not understand him and looked toward me for interpretation. For many Chinese residents in the Chinatown area,
not being able to understand and speak English is a major obstacle in everyday life. One middle-aged resident, Mrs. Lin, an enthusiastic learner of English, told me that not being able to speak English had really limited her mobility. She is afraid of going anywhere beyond Chinatown. Although quite a few of the students in the ESL class that I volunteered to teach are in their eighties, and thus language learning takes place very slowly for them, they are excited to be able to communicate with others even just minimally beyond gestures. For example, once Wen Ayi happily reported that she used the phrase learned in class, “I’d like to mail this package to China,” in the local post office and they understood her!

On the other end of the continuum, in Wah Luck House, the Senior Citizen Center, and also the Chinese Community Church on 5th Street, Chinese, that is, Mandarin, Cantonese, and their dialects, is spoken most of the time. When I visited Wah Luck House on a Sunday, the door keeper, who is a native speaker of Punjabi, asked me to teach her how to say simple phrases such as “please sign here” in both Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese so that she could communicate with residents more conveniently. However, Wah Luck House is also linguistically diverse in its own way. Liu Bobo and Wen Ayi, an elderly couple originally from northern China, told me that they did not have regular interaction with their neighbors because of the language barrier. While they
speak mandarin, many of their neighbors speak Taishan, a dialect of Cantonese. When they accompanied me in the elevator, I observed that they did interact with other elderly residents in the building, however non-verbally, with a nod and a smile. Strangely, the management of Wah Luck House disseminates official information in English only. The elderly residents often take announcements and notices to Chinatown Community Cultural Center or the Service Center at the Chinese Community Church for help with translation.

*Chinatown as Lived Place: Activity Spaces*

Divergent language choices and interaction orders as described above affect the routes that individuals take in and around Chinatown. Based on participatory maps drawn during interviews and ethnographic observations, I will discuss four representative activity spaces and how they are shaped by both spatial practices and senses of place, in particular, geopolitical orientations.

The first map shown in Figure 6.16 was drawn by Mr. Wang, the Mayor of Chinatown and the Chairman of the Chinatown Steering Committee. It indicates the streets and the boundaries of Chinatown with the cardinal directions of North and West clearly marked. During the interview, he emphasized that anything beyond the boundary lines was not part of Chinatown. Thus, he perceives Chinatown from a cartographic perspective, as “N” points upward and
served as a reference point for his drawing. Recorded in the interview, he also indicated the width of streets by leaving more space between two parallel lines to represent H Street as 寬的街 (kuang de jie; wider street) and less space between two lines to represent I Street as 窄的街 (zhai de jie; narrower street). Therefore, his attention was also at the materiality of space. However, Mr. Wang did not label as many buildings and stores as other participants did. He only marked Verizon Center, labeled in Chinese as 球场 (qiuchang; ball field), Gallery Place (shorthanded as GP), CVS, Wah Luck House without a label, and the Starbucks building, which his family owned and lived in before.

Figure 6.16: Mr. Wang's map
These characteristics of Mr. Wang’s map are influenced, on the one hand, by his leadership role in Chinatown, and on the other hand, by his activity space largely outside Chinatown. His perspective on Chinatown is similar to that of a policy maker, more concerned with the boundaries of the neighborhood and its material space as a whole than individual stores. For example, he represented Chinatown and attended inter-neighborhood meetings with organizers of nearby neighborhoods such as Shaw. Moreover, although his family once owned a restaurant, a grocery store, and a furniture store in the area, he currently lives in Chevy Chase, DC, an affluent neighborhood close to the DC-Maryland border. Most of their shopping and dining activities happened in the suburbs of Maryland. He likes to take his entire family to a steakhouse near Bethesda, MD, and each of them could spend nearly $100 dollars there. Although Mr. Wang is still in the office of CCCC quite often, he does not walk around Chinatown any more. In the morning, he takes the redline metro (subway) to the Gallery Place-Chinatown and usually comes to CCCC directly. In the evening, his daughter, Amanda, the Center’s manager, drives them back home.

In comparison with Mr. Wang’s map, Liu Bobo, an elderly Chinese man who lives in the Wah Luck House with his wife, Wen Ayi, drew a map with no clear-cut boundary line but with more neighborhood establishments labeled (Figure 6.17). Five out these eight place names were written in Chinese using
general nouns: 图书馆 (tushuguan; library), 大会堂 (dahuitang; literally, grand meeting hall, i.e. convention center), 邮局 (youju; post office), 体育中心 (tiyuzhongxin; literally, sports center, i.e. Verizon Center), 教堂 (jiaotang, church), and 亚裔老年活动中心 (yayi laonian huodong zhongxin; Asian Senior Citizen Activity Center). The three places that he indicated with proper nouns in English are CVS, CCCC (indicated with a single “C”), and the Chevy Chase Bank, but he struggled with the spelling of the last. In the interview, he referred to the Chevy Chase Bank in Chinese as 银行 (yinhang; bank). He labeled the only Chinese grocery store with a proper noun in Chinese as 大新 (daxin; spelled as New Da Hsin on their shop sign). Finally, intriguingly, he indicated the Wah Luck House, his apartment building with its street number – “800” on 6th Street.

Figure 6.17: Liu Bobo's map
These labeled places are where Liu Bobo visits frequently in the neighborhood. They go to CCCC for English lessons, to the Senior Citizen Center for $1 lunch, to the Church on weekends. They bank with Chevy Chase, send letters or packages back to China at the post office, and get their prescription filled at CVS. The Martin Luther King Library, Convention Center, and the Verizon Centers are locations that sometimes large community events are held, for example, the townhall meeting in the library, and the annual Senior Citizen Festival at the Convention Center. If we connect these dots on the map, we have the shape of Liu Bobo and Wen Ayi’s activity space in Chinatown. Although I have not walked with them throughout Chinatown, they told me during the interview that they prefer to walk on I Street, 6th, and F Street, because H Street is 太乱 (tailuan, literally “too messy,” but it also means “unsafe”). Their explanation was further corroborated by my observations of other Chinese senior residents making detours around the center of Chinatown. Many Chinese residents in Chinatown often perceive the large number of homeless people, most of whom is African American, as a threat to safety. During my interview with Yan Ayi, who is in her seventies but looks much younger, she told me that, ever since she heard a few men loitering around the street corner yelling at her, “Hey, pretty girl!” one evening, she would not walk on the street by herself after dark. Another explanation for their avoidance of the center of Chinatown is simply an economic
one. Most of these elderly residents live on social security, and could not afford to eat at any of the restaurants in the area, including Chinese ones. Moreover, American Chinese food does not taste good to them. Therefore, the bilingual signage on non-Chinese restaurants on 7th Street means very little to them.

Not recorded on this map is Liu Bobo and Wen Ayi’s other activity space in suburban Virginia. They take the free van provided by the Senior Citizen Center to go grocery shopping at Asian supermarkets, and their children come to pick them up, so they could stay at their suburban houses during long holidays. Similarly, Yan Ayi and Zhao Ayi occasionally visit their children’s families in Georgetown, DC and New London, Connecticut respectively.

In stark contrast to both Mr. Wang and Liu Bobo’s maps, Adeline’s map is much more detailed (Figure 6.18). Originally from North Carolina, Adeline moved to DC with her husband, who works for a law firm in downtown DC. They bought a condo in a renovated building (marked with a star on the map), right across from Wah Luck House on 6th Street. As an independent artist and designer, she works mostly at home. In addition, she is actively involved in the Calvary Baptist Church, a historical building on H Street between 7th and 8th, with a grand maroon steeple, and is often busy making artworks to accompany the pastor’s weekly sermons.
Figure 6.18: Adeline's map

As we can see from her map, Adeline knows the neighborhood inside out. She identified most stores and buildings, Chinese and non-Chinese, in the area with proper names in English and included more beyond what is the official boundary of Chinatown. Her drawing is so detailed that she even indicates the shape of the driveway of the National Buildings Museum (NBM), and she notes the change in some buildings over time. For example, “CVS” is labeled as “closed,” and “AT&T” used to be the Benetton store. During the interview, Adeline took the map-drawing task very seriously, apologized for any small
uncertainty, and attributed this high degree of accuracy to her habitual attention to details. But at the same time, producing such a detailed map would not be possible if she had not frequently walked around the neighborhood, explored every little store, and tried almost every non-Chinese restaurant in the area with her husband. I got to know Adeline in a free Taiji class at CCCC. At that time, she visited the Center at least four times a week for Taiji and brushing painting classes. She is very friendly with elderly Chinese residents when she meets them in the Center and tries to communicate with smiles and gestures despite the fact she does not speak any Chinese. When we walked from the Center to the Calvary Church one day, I also observed that Adeline was at ease walking through the center of the Chinatown. As her building is separated only by an alley from the Jesus Mission, a shelter for the homeless, she told me that sometimes the homeless people could see her and she them. One time, they even waved at her, and she happily waved back. Moreover, Adeline indicated the bus stop to Georgetown and several metro exits, as she also takes art classes and works at a paper store in Georgetown.

Compared with Adeline’s map, Laura’s drawing (Figure 6.19) shows fewer details. A government employee in an office building on 7th Street, Laura lives in a Maryland suburb, near Baltimore. On weekdays, she drives from her house to the MARC commuter train station, rides the train into Union Station,
and then the red line metro rail to Chinatown. The commute takes about 1.5 hour each way.

![Figure 6.19: Laura's map](image)

As we can see from her map, most places that she identified are non-Chinese restaurants in the area where she goes for lunch, and they concentrate upon the block of 7th Street between I and H Streets. She most enthusiastically recommended Nando for Portuguese children, especially because her mother is Portuguese. She labeled three Chinese stores using general nouns: “Kung Fu” for 华盛出国人员服务中心 (Wah Shing Intl’ Gift Shop, a gift shop that sells Kung Fu weapons), “Chinese apothecary” for Dah Shin (a Chinese gift shop that also sells
Chinese dry goods and herbal medicines); and simply “Chinese” for Chopsticks, a Chinese restaurant that has closed recently. Laura also participates in the Taiji class at CCCC twice a week during her lunch break. Therefore she identified CCCC together with “taichi,” noted the police station located in the same building, and the Chinese restaurant “Big Wong” next door. In general, Laura is not familiar with the geography of Chinatown, because she usually goes straight back home after work, and rarely comes to Chinatown on weekends, except for major Kung Fu events, because her college-age daughter is a lion-dance enthusiast, and her husband likes Kung Fu as well.

In short, looking at these maps in comparison, we can see that the degree of detail and the shape of activity space reflected in them are, first, certainly influenced by the participants’ familiarity with the language in which store names are inscribed. For example, Liu Bobo had difficulty spelling the name of his bank, and Laura referred to Chinese stores by their general functions, for example, Kung Fu and apothecary. More importantly, however, these maps are also conditioned by the degree of involvement in the neighborhood, as we have seen in the brevity of Mr. Wang and Laura’s map in contrast with the extremely detailed map produced by Adeline.
Finally, I would also like to point to another factor that has shaped these map drawings – senses of place, in particular, orientation toward geopolitical entities on various spatial scales (Rose 1996; Eckert 2004). Mr. Wang’s orientation is mainly toward Washington, DC on the scale of city, of which Chinatown is a part. As the Mayor of Chinatown, he represents the community in meetings with District government agencies and Council members. In the past, he and his business partners also owned a more upscale Chinese restaurant on K Street. And almost every morning when I volunteered at the Center, I saw him reading the *Washington Post*. On the other hand, he is not familiar with the details inside Chinatown any more.

In contrast, for Liu Bobo, the fact that Chinatown is a part of America is more important than its location in Washington, DC or its own identity as a neighborhood. Thus, he orients toward the United States on a national scale. When I asked him if he liked living here (“Ni xihuan zhu zai zheli ma?”), he answered yes and compared life in America with life in mainland China, while I actually intended to index Chinatown with *zheli* (here) in the question. Ten years ago, they retired in the City of Nanjing in China, north of Shanghai. Since two of their children had already immigrated to the US, they came here, first, to take care of their grandchildren born here, and, then, helped with their son’s
restaurant in suburban Viriginia. For them, apartments here are cheaper but more spacious. His wife, Wen Ayi, also added that the air quality in America was much better. The only complaint they had was about the frequent sirens on the streets.

The difference between Mr. Wang and Liu Bobo’s geopolitical orientations can be attributed to them belonging to two generations of Chinese immigrants, despite their similar age. Mr. Wang immigrated before 1949 to study for his master’s degree in chemistry in a southern state, and then moved to Washington, DC after graduation, met his wife, and raised their children in Chinatown. Liu Bobo and Wen Ayi, in contrast, immigrated in the 1997, after their children had already become permanent residents or US citizens in the US.

Adeline’s orientation is clearly toward the scale of the neighborhood. She and her husband chose to buy the condo in Chinatown because it was close to her husband’s office, and they enjoyed the diversity that Chinatown offered. Adeline cares about every little store in the neighborhood. She got a Chinese name chop carved for herself at an art gallery in a less noticeable location, and was thrilled to see the renovation activity of the Chinese restaurant, New Big Wong, which she had thought might be sold to another non-Chinese store. Adeline is also concerned with problems in the neighborhood and was among the few residents who spoke up at community police meetings. However, as
mentioned before, she does not see homeless people as a safety threat. Rather, she was concerned with drinking activities in the alleys behind her building. In comparison, Laura’s orientation is toward the greater Washington Metropolitan region. Chinatown is only a place for work.

To summarize the discussion in this section, there is a sharp contrast between Chinatown as a ritual place and Chinatown as a lived place. As the former, Chinatown is designed, celebrated, and photographed as an image; as the latter, Chinatown is a neighborhood with multiple centers of interaction segregated along linguistic, ethnic, and economic boundaries. Further, Chinatown is also lived through individual’s spatial practices, which constitute activity spaces of various shapes. These activity spaces are, in turn, affected by geopolitical orientation at different spatial scales as well as linguistic and economic factors. Coming back to the focus of this dissertation, the linguistic landscape of Chinatown blends with the ritual place of Chinatown, but is largely left out in its lived place. It serves only symbolically but has no practical function. Even with bilingual signage, most non-Chinese stores and restaurants do not appeal to, nor can be afforded by Chinese residents in Chinatown. Chinese restaurants also do not draw a large lunch crowd. In the following section, I turn to discuss another type of contrast – the conflict between ritual and material place.
Conflict between Ritual and Material Place: Chinatown vs. Downtown

As analyzed in the previous section, the main objectives of the new design of Chinatown was to draw people to see Chinatown. At almost every community meeting, Mr. Wang has consistently emphasized the value of Chinatown in attracting tourists and thus the necessity to “promote Chinatown” through measures such as mandatory bilingual signage. However, this focus on the image of Chinatown not only contrasts with everyday spatial practices in the neighborhood, but also conflicts with Chinatown as a material place, referring to the physical space perceived as an economic resource. It is found that, despite negotiation efforts initiated by those who seek to preserve Chinatown, the economic value of this space of Chinatown triumphs over its ritual image.

This conflict was first revealed to me through the referring terms that Amanda uses for another neighborhood organization – Chinatown Revitalization Council (CRC), which has closer connections to Taiwan. She calls them waimian de ren (“outside people”). Initially I thought she had meant to say waiguo ren (literally, “outside country people,” i.e. foreigners), but she clarified that she was referring to CRC, as they were not from Chinatown. Even though they are ethnically Chinese, most of them have not lived in Chinatown, whereas most of the founders and members of the Chinatown Steering Committee (CSC) settled down in Chinatown when they first came and lived there for decades. In
addition, “outsiders” support commercial development in Chinatown, but we (CCCC and CSC) are for the preservation and promotion. Thus, these two opposing stances toward development are phrased in spatial terms.

However, what I have found is that, although CRC’s focus is on business and CSC’s focus is on culture, CRC has not had as great an influence on altering the material surface of Chinatown as CSC had thought. Rather, the real dramatic change in Chinatown over the past decade is a consequence of the revitalization projects facilitated by Downtown DC Business Improvement District (Downtown BID) in the urban core of Washington, DC initiated in the 1980s. Established in 1997 under District legislation, Downtown BID is a non-profit organization funded through downtown property owners’ taxes, in order “to create a vibrant, inviting and smart place where people from all walks of life are able to explore, create and share remarkable urban experiences that inspire and revitalize” (Downtown BID 2007). Figure 6.20 below shows the area included in Downtown BID, and Figure 6.21 shows the net fiscal impact of Downtown BID. Plainly speaking, Downtown BID generates a significant amount of tax revenue for the District, a common motivation for urban revitalization projects.
Figure 6.20: Downtown map in 2004 & 2005 Downtown BID Annual Reports

Figure 6.21: Downtown’s net fiscal impact (Downtown BID 2007)
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</table>

Table 6.1: Mentions of Chinatown in Downtown BID Annual Reports

Because Chinatown is fully contained in the Downtown BID area, I examined four publicly available Annual Reports of Downtown BID (2004-2007), paying close attention to how Chinatown is discursively constructed in these reports. Table 6.1 presents the results. Surprisingly, Chinatown is named only seven times in four annual reports, 80 pages in total. Two mentions are part of other proper nouns – Chinatown Park and Gallery Place – Chinatown station. Three mentions are labels on downtown BID maps, two in photo captions, and three in the text. Table 1 below summarizes the frequency and location of Chinatown’s mention in four Downtown BID annual reports.

The only improvement project related to Chinatown found in the 2006 Annual Report (9) aims to install “more efficient and higher-wattage lights in Chinatown.” Recalling the design of spectacular lights in the 1989 Study, this
goal focuses exclusively on the practical function of lights rather than aesthetics. In contrast to this lack of reference to Chinatown in these downtown reports, images of Chinatown in photo and color illustration occurred on two annual reports, both featuring the archway, and in many photos inside the document. This finding indicates again that Chinatown’s value to urban development is restricted to its image.

Main development activities with total worth in the billions were carried out by identifying “downtown” as unified and autonomous area. In fact, the Downtown BID maps indicate the downtown area with a dark yellow shade in the 2004 and 2005 reports and do not label individual neighborhoods on the map (Figure 6.22) until 2005.

![Figure 6.22: Downtown BID map with neighborhoods labeled](Downtown BID 2006; emphasis mine)

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Before 2007, downtown was also discursively constructed as a single neighborhood, as shown in the following quote in “the letter from chairman” in the 2005 Annual Report:

> As an organization dedicated to creating and maintaining a physical and business environment where people choose to locate their businesses, expand and create jobs and live, the Downtown BID has contributed successfully to the neighborhood’s economic growth and image.

(Downtown BID 2005; emphasis mine)

In 2006’s Annual Report, downtown is again referred to as a neighborhood, as in “when Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) was formed in 1997, the neighborhood suffered from a mostly negative image” (Downtown BID 2006, emphasis mine). In 2007, however, in addition to labeling neighborhoods on the map, the boundary of downtown is explicitly described and the contained neighborhoods named:

> More than 800 commercial properties comprise the Downtown BID area within the boundaries of the National Mall on the south, Massachusetts Avenue on the north, Louisiana Avenue on the east and the White House on the west. The Downtown BID area encompasses the Gallery Place, Chinatown, Federal Triangle, Franklin Square, McPherson Square, Midtown and Penn Quarter neighborhoods. (Downtown BID 2007; emphasis mine)
It is important to note here among this list of neighborhoods, Gallery Place is, in fact, a mixed-use commercial and residential building, and technically situated within the boundary of Chinatown. However, this elevation of status can be attributed to the fact that Gallery Place is one of the key development projects, and the President of Akridge, its developer, sits on the Executive Committee of Downtown BID.

To summarize the above analysis, Chinatown’s value to urban revitalization lies solely in the image that it provides, especially the grand and spectacular Friendship Archway, whereas the economic value of the physical space of Chinatown, thanks to its location in the urban center, is of greater value to developers and also to the District government, because Downtown BID is an efficient tax revenue generator. In this process, however, the distinctive identities of individual neighborhoods, including Chinatown, are not as important, when the success of urban revitalization is measured in terms of billion dollar development projects and millions of visitors each year. Having compared and contrasted the ritual aspect of Chinatown with its lived and material aspects in the previous sections, I will now look beyond this geosemiotic aggregate and discern how it is connected and aligned with non-local places on various spatial scales.
CHINATOWN: TOURIST DESTINATION OR ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOOD?

First, I will analyze how Chinatown is discursively linked with other non-local places on the spatial scale of an urban neighborhood. After looking at public discourses (the Chinatown Design Guidelines Study and a billboard advertisement in Chinatown), I have found that Chinatown is often discursively aligned with a number of popular tourist destinations in the United States. In contrast, in private discourses (interviews and ethnographic observations), Washington, DC Chinatown is more often compared with other North American Chinatowns such as the ones in New York City and San Francisco.

In a spin-off study from this dissertation (Lou 2008 & forthcoming), I examined closely a billboard advertisement (Figure 6.23) inside the Gallery Place-Chinatown metro station, featuring Tony Cheng and his daughter Stephanie, who own and manage Tony Cheng’s Seafood Restaurant and Mongolian Barbeque on H Street. While the previous study analyzes multiple linguistic, visual, and geosemiotic features of the ad, here I choose to focus on how Chinatown is compared to New York’s Times Square in the copy text (Figure 6.24).
Sentence 3 in the text presents a general comparison (Halliday and Hasan 1976), drawing attention to the “likeness between things” (77), in this case,
between Washington, DC Chinatown and New York City’s Times Square. However, there is little similarity in the physical characteristics of these two places. As described in the research setting in Chapter 2, DC Chinatown is rather tiny, so small that it is often missed by passers-by. Although its official boundary is larger, in effect, it is now only less than two blocks, with Chinese restaurants and gift shops concentrated on H Street. Even Mr. Wang, once half-jokingly, half-despairingly referred to Chinatown as “China-block” (see also similar comments documented in Pang and Rath 2007). Despite their obvious dissimilarities in terms of physical appearance, the analogy is not uncommon. As Stephanie informed me during the interview, it was a rather casual association that “just happened”:

The first time I heard it, it was a few years ago. That was kinda, like, when, I think when they first built Gallery Place. Umm, I don't remember who I heard it from. But I heard like, oh, Chinatown's going to be like a mini Times Square kind of thing. I don't know it's a goal, necessarily. But it's naturally evolved into it. Not with our intention. You know, we don't have the intention, oh, we want it to be Times Square. But now with the addition of like the screens on the rotunda, people are kinda naturally making connections. There is also the big screen on the Verizon Center. So, not something kind of premeditated. You know what I mean. But It just happened. (Stephanie, February 19, 2008)
This naturalness of the analogy again points to the ideological nature of discourse, when its own producer is unaware of it origin and effect. The cohesive chain (Halliday and Hasan 1976) that threads together Chinatown and Times Square, however, provides a solution as to what the analogy is about. As shown in Figure 6.25 below, the first tie (subscript 1) links “Chinatown” with the category of places called “destination” through the lexical relation of hyponymy. The second tie (subscript 2) establishes Chinatown as the anaphoric referent of the two uses of “it,” the second of which is linked with “Times Square” through comparative reference (subscript 3). Through these chains of cohesion, “Chinatown” and “Times Square” are connected as both hyponyms of “destination.”

\[\text{Chinatown}_{1,2,3} \rightarrow \text{destination}_{1} \rightarrow \text{it}_{2} \rightarrow \text{it}_{2,3} \rightarrow \text{Times Square}_{3}\]

Figure 6.25: Cohesive chain linking Chinatown to Times Square

A similar discursive connection between Chinatown and other tourist destinations is found in the third design challenge proposed in the Chinatown Design Guideline Studies (AEPA 1989, 17), as shown in Figure 6.26 below:
Although phrased as a challenge, this question can also be seen as an objective to place Chinatown in the class of places including Williamsburg (presumably the one in Virginia), Harborplace, Baltimore, Maryland, Georgetown, DC, Little Italy, New York, and Adams-Morgan, DC. What do they have in common? Rather obviously, they are all popular tourist destinations. Intriguing, however, despite the fact that Chinatown in New York City is also a well-known tourist destination and an ethnic counterpart of the Chinatown in Washington, DC, it is not chosen as a place that Chinatown was designed to emulate, even among “ethnically interesting” ones like Little Italy or Adams Morgan.

In the billboard, Chinatown, NYC, was not chosen as the comparative referent, either. During the interview, when asked about her view of the Chinatown in New York City, Stephanie says:
For me, it's too busy. It's too [blazy?]. It's too dirty. But you know, that, that's what people think when they see Chinatown. You know, it's like, all Chinese people. It's like street vendors, like uh, street-level shops, you know, selling everything, fruit, vegetable, and a lot of little Chinese restaurants. (Stephanie, February 19, 2008)

As Basso (1988) remarks in his study of language and landscape among the Western Apache, “narratives and truths alike can be swiftly ‘activated,’ foregrounded, and brought into focused awareness through the use of placenames alone” (121). In this billboard ad and the abovementioned design challenge, the evocation place names such as “Times Square,” “Williamsburg,” “Georgetown,” and “Harborplace” foregrounds the identity of Washington, DC Chinatown as a tourist destination. At the same time, the absence of reference to other North American Chinatowns backgrounds its ethnic identity.

On the other hand, during interviews as well as fieldwork observations, the comparison between Washington, DC Chinatown and Chinatowns in other American cities occurs frequently. Although one of the modules in my interview guide was to ask my interviewees whether they have been to other North American Chinatowns and what they think, the topic naturally came up without my prompt. Opposite from Stephanie’s opinion regarding the NYC Chinatown, all of my non-Chinese interviewees think they are similar in many ways, especially in terms of drawing tourists, but the Chinatowns in NYC and San
Francisco are much bigger and more authentic. For example, Lillian remembered especially vividly that on her visit to San Francisco Chinatown she saw many elderly Chinese sitting in a public park and chatting with each other, whereas this is a rare social scene in DC Chinatown. Thus, spatial practice itself is interpreted as an important part of Chinatown’s place identity and used as a key criterion of authenticity. Among the Chinese residents, however, there is no consensus as to which Chinatown is better. One morning, I was running late to the ESL class and walked in on a heated discussion between Liu Bobo and Wu Bobo, another elderly resident in Wah Luck House. While Liu Bobo thinks DC Chinatown is newer and tidier, Wu Bobo thinks it is much more convenient in NYC Chinatown, because it has so many more Chinese stores. Similarly, a middle-aged woman in the ESL class, who lived in NYC Chinatown for a few years before getting married and moving to DC, thinks that these two Chinatowns are very different: “In NYC Chinatown, everybody speaks Cantonese. You go to all the stores, and everybody speaks Cantonese. Here, I don’t even know how to buy things without being able to speak English.”

In short, on the scale of neighborhood, Washington, DC Chinatown is discursively aligned with other popular tourist destinations in public discourse rather than its ethnic counterparts. In private discourse, Chinatowns in North
American are often compared, and DC Chinatown is typically considered as a deviation from the archetype of authentic Chinatowns.

**LINKING CHINATOWN WITH CHINA**

The second linkage I have noticed is drawn between Chinatown and China, a geopolitical entity on the scale of nation-state. These two places are connected, naturally, through the movement of human bodies across boundaries in migration and traveling. Secondly, they are also connected through the flow of capital and material commodities. Finally, Chinatown is also increasingly linked with China through discursive and semiotic means, as the latter’s influence on the global stage rises.

As mentioned previously in Chapter 5, over a century ago, Chinatown emerged as many male coolie laborers migrated to the US from southern China and stayed together facing a foreign environment that was unwelcoming and often times outright discriminatory. As immigration law relaxed over the years, Chinese immigrants in the USA increased not only in numbers but also in gender diversity. Consequently, many Chinatowns grew in businesses and expanded into a unique kind of social organization. Thus, there is an inherent link between Chinatown and the home country, China, by human bodies migrating across the boundaries of nation-states. Since the 1980s, however, immigrants from China
have come from an increasingly higher education background and with more fluent English language skills, and they choose to and also can afford to live in more affluent suburbs than Chinatowns.

But this link between China and Chinatown through spatial practices still exists, albeit probably more often in the reversed direction. After they obtain US Citizenship, many Chinese Americans go back to China to make investments in a wide range of areas from real estate to biochemistry labs. Many older immigrants also prefer to retire in China instead of the US. Further, there are more non-Chinese Americans interested in China and in visiting the country, and they often look to Chinatown as a branch of the country.

Chinatown is also connected with China through material resources. As mentioned before in relation to the maintenance cost of the archway, the District government agencies suggested the transfer of responsibilities to the Chinese government via the Chinese Embassy, because China has even more money now than in 1986 when the archway was built. During more recent meetings discussing the future of Chinatown, many even suggested increasing the involvement of the Chinese government in the preservation of Chinatown. Although I have not observed any actual financial flow (CCCC is a non-profit organization funded by the District government), many material objects, books, DVDs, videotapes, and Chinese crafts displayed in the Chinatown Community
Cultural Center were donated by the Chinese Embassy. There is a regular shipment of brand-new Chinese books from the Embassy as well as stacks of promotional materials promoting tourism in China, which are displayed on the table in the entrance hallway of the Center.

In addition to spatial practices and the circulation of material resources, China is also often discursively and semiotically evoked in Chinatown. When I first visited the Center, its walls were full of large framed color photos of places in China, spanning from smiling country children with their sheep in Yun’nan to modern skyscrapers in Shanghai. Images from Chinatown also appear in many promotional materials of programs offered in Chinatown.

![The China Exchange](image)

*Figure 6.27: Cover of promotional brochure for the “China Exchange” program at CCCC*
For example, on the cover of the brochure advertising “The China Exchange” (Figure 6.27) a program recruiting 10th graders that attend Washington, DC public schools to take Chinese lessons at the Center, a picture of the Great Wall is placed in the center as an emblematic image of the country. Moreover, China is also anachronistically associated with traditional culture, as illustrated by the slogan below the picture of the Great Wall: “The 5000 year old culture experience in the heart of Washington, D.C.” The cultural and economic values of the Chinese language are further articulated in the program mission:

- Provide a fun, engaging, stimulating environment to learn about a 5000 year old culture that is extremely applicable in today’s competitive world
- Prepare students to compete in a global economy
- Prepare students to enter college with a working knowledge of a language that is spoken by 1.3 billion people in the world

Throughout the brochure, the term Chinatown itself has never occurred except in the name of the Chinatown Community Cultural Center. In the slogan, it is referred to as “the heart of Washington, D.C.” Thus, the Chinese language becomes a more valuable resource when Chinatown itself is placed on a global spatial scale with the linguistic as well as visual evocation of China.

Attention is also turned to Chinatown, corresponding to significant events in China. During the 2008 Olympics, the number of students in Mr. Lei’s
Taiji class increased from 6 to 20 for two weeks, thanks to an article featuring CCCC in the Washington Post, with a photo of a Taiji class in progress (Figure 6.28). In the title of the article, the author suggests that even if one could not travel to Beijing, classes at CCCC offer a substitute experience. Here again, a community center in Chinatown is not only indexing but also becomes an icon of the referent.

Figure 6.28: Article in the *Washington Post*, featuring Taiji class at CCCC during Beijing Olympics, August 2008

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Therefore, it seems that, over time, the linkage between Chinatown and China has taken place increasingly through the flow of material resources, cultural symbols, and discourses in addition to migration. At the same time, spatial practices across geographic boundaries are also more frequently in the reversed direction.

**Summary**

By situating linguistic landscape in its spatial context, I have looked inside as well as outside the geosemiotic aggregate of Chinatown. Internally, Chinatown is constructed as a *ritual place*, through planning discourse, material construction, celebratory event, and tourist spatial practices. In all three ways, Chinatown is “read” rather than “lived.” This *ritual place* of Chinatown is in stark contrast with it as a *lived place*. First, I looked at Chinatown as a whole as a multilingual neighborhood which is, however, organized into separated centers of interaction along linguistic, economic, and ethnic boundaries. Then, I shifted the perspective to the individual activity spaces of residents, community leaders, and daytime workers in the area, and suggested that their divergent activity spaces are, in part, shaped by their own spatial practices of walking and commuting, and, in part, by their orientations toward geopolitical entities on different spatial scales. In addition to this contrast between a homogeneous *ritual place* and a
heterogeneous lived place, there is also a conflict between Chinatown’s ritual image and its economic value. It is found that the material space of Chinatown and its associated financial capital matter more to commercial developers and urban policy makers than its neighborhood identity, and Chinatown’s most valuable asset to them is its image.

In the second part of this chapter, I looked externally and examined how Chinatown was discursively linked with other places on a similar neighborhood scale. It is noticed that in public discourse, Chinatown is often aligned with places in the category of tourist destinations rather than ethnic neighborhoods. But in private discourse, Chinatown is often perceived as deviating from the archetype, phrased positively as “the new kind of Chinatown,” or negatively as “fake.” Beyond the scale of neighborhoods and tourist destinations, I have also found that Chinatown is increasingly linked to China through discursive and semiotic means in addition to the travel of human bodies and the circulation of financial capital and material goods. The discursive and semiotic links were evoked by using symbolic images representing China, such as the Great Wall, as well as symbolic practices, such as Taiji.

So far I have considered how others read and live in Chinatown and travel across geopolitical boundaries. In the following concluding chapter, I will reflect on how my multiple identities and activities as a researcher, a Chinese student in
the US, and a community volunteer have influenced my understanding of Chinatown. But first, I will summarize the dissertation.
When I arrived in the United States from China almost six years ago, on my first trip to Washington, DC Chinatown, I was amazed at the place in front of my eyes and thought, “This is more Chinese than China!” Perhaps it was this first impression that planted the seed of this dissertation. Travels to other Chinatowns in North America and Europe in the following years further increased my curiosity and led me to wonder what it is about this Chinatown that makes it look so different.

I started to answer this question by looking at the shop signs, but soon I realized the analysis of linguistic landscape alone, though revealing of subtle differences, could not provide the full answer to the initial question. In order to understand Chinatown’s place identity better, I had to go beyond linguistic landscape and see how it produced and how it interacted with other aspects of the place. In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize what I have found by employing an integrative theoretical framework and methodological approach. Then, I will present how these findings have been applied to a community-based map project. Finally, I will discuss how this dissertation contributes more
generally to our understanding of the roles of language and discourse in place-making, of the value of ethnographic study of visual language, and of the potential of material language as mediation between cultural representation and political economy.

SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

The aim of this dissertation is to better understand the roles of language and discourse in the place-making of Washington, DC Chinatown, a small, traditionally ethnic urban neighborhood with a predominant presence of non-Chinese businesses but homogeneous bilingual commercial signage and with an ambivalent identity frequently perceived as inauthentic. While most existing studies on linguistic landscape approach it as a kind of language policy in multilingual societies (e.g. Landry and Bourhis 1997; Gorter 2006; Shohamy and Gorter 2008), I argue that it has the potential to provide valuable insights into research on language and place (e.g. Tuan 1991; Johnstone 1990, 2004; Finnegan 1998; Keating 2000), which has so far tended to focus on spatial representation alone (but see Scollon and Scollon 2003, Modan 2007 for exception).

Integrating two triadic models in Lefebvre (1991)’s theory on the social production of space and Scollon and Scollon (2003)’s geosemiotic framework, I propose that place identity is constituted by material space, spatial
representation, and spatial practice and that all three dimensions are interrelated with language and discourse. In order to show how the interaction among them takes place, I reconceptualize linguistic landscape as a cultural text that sediments in multiple historical and social processes on various timescales (Silverstein and Urban 1996; Lemke 2000; Scollon and Scollon 2004) and as a material-semiotic object that is part of a multilingual yet polycentric environment linked with other places on various spatial scales (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, Scollon and Scollon 2003; Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005 a & b; Jensen 2006).

This multidimensional conceptual framework naturally calls for a combination of research methods, including 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the neighborhood, photographic data of shop signs and spatial practices, interviews with neighborhood residents, community organizers and daytime workers, recordings of community meetings, and various types of public discourses including policy documents and promotional materials. These data from complementary sources allow me to examine multiple perspectives on the place identity of Washington, DC Chinatown.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the photographic data of shop signs reveals Chinatown’s homogeneous bilingual landscape as a concrete instantiation of heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]), a place where multiple times
and spaces are juxtaposed. Adopting analytical tools from Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and Scollon and Scollon (2003) in the examination of shop signs, I have found systematic similarities and differences between Chinese and non-Chinese stores’ signage. On one hand, they share in common language choice, symmetrical layout, text vector, and material emplacement, which simultaneously indexes traditional Chinese aesthetic values and the historical change of Chinatown from a monolingual, segregated ethnic enclave to a multilingual, integrated neighborhood. On the other hand, they diverge in terms of visual and material features, such as code preference, translation content, and color scheme. These more subtle features serve to minimize the visual prominence of Chinese characters on non-Chinese businesses’ storefront design and thus are used as semiotic tactics by corporations to comply with mandatory design policy in order to gain entry into a profitable central urban location. Therefore, the glossy surface of DC Chinatown is the visible textual artifact (Silverstein and Urban 1996) resulting from conflicts and compromises that are beyond linguistic landscape.

Situating linguistic landscape in the temporal trajectory of its production, then, sheds light on the invisible social inequality. I identify three timescales (Lemke 2000) from which multiple socio-historical processes flow into the design of shop signs in Chinatown, ranging from the history of Chinese immigration to
the US and major events on the timescale of a century, to the Civil Rights Movement and Washington, DC’s urban revitalization project on the timescale of fifty years, and finally to the review process of a new storefront design on the timescale of two months. Within and across these timescales, I have found major shifts and gaps in participant framework, linguistic, political, and economic resources, and the linguistic as well as visual definition of Chinatown’s Chinese names and its geographical boundary. These temporal changes contribute to a design policy that is detached from local history and at the same time in favor of the development of material space. During community meetings, Chinese community organizations’ lack of economic, political, as well as linguistic resources further solidifies the power of corporations in pushing through a design proposal. Thus, by entangling these multiple trajectories leading into linguistic landscape, we have observed a complex framework of participation with unequal political power and the employment of resources in approving a shop sign design, and we have reached a better understanding of how multiple times are synchronized (Blommaert 2005) within the same space and contribute to the temporal aspect of heterotopia.

To unpack the spatial aspect of Chinatown as heterotopia, I first examine the neighborhood as a geosemiotic aggregate (Scollon and Scollon 2003), in which its linguistic landscape along with other material constructions such as the
Friendship Archway and spatial practices such as the Chinese New Year parade together constitute the ritual place of Chinatown that is designed to be “read” (Lefebvre 1991). It contrasts sharply with the lived place of Chinatown that is divided along linguistic as well as ethnic and economic boundaries (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005 a & b). Moreover, through ethnographic observations and analysis of interviews and cognitive maps, it is found that an individual’s activity space in, around, and away from Chinatown is shaped not only by language barriers but also by different orientations toward geopolitical entities on various spatial scales. Looking beyond the neighborhood to the urban areas of the District, I have found that the identity of Chinatown was less valued by the city government in comparison with the economic benefits brought by the development of real estate and retail businesses in the material space surrounding the neighborhood. On yet a higher spatial scale, Chinatown is increasingly linked with China discursively and semiotically, which further reinforces its monumentality.

Thus, by contextualizing the linguistic landscape of Washington, DC Chinatown both temporally and spatially, this study shows that Chinatown’s ambivalent place identity is shaped by a wide range of social, historical, political, and economic factors, and cannot be reduced to the responsibility of a single producer. Its ritual image is the product of the reestablished political and
economic connection between Chinese immigrants and their home country as China’s influence and power on the world stage grow; its shrinking size is a result of intensified urban revitalization over the past twenty years in Washington, DC as well as new immigrants’ preference to settle in the suburbs since 1965; this incongruence between Chinatown’s ritual image and lived place is also a consequence of the relatively few communicative as well as material resources that the Chinese community has in comparison with the other major players in the neighborhood, i.e. commercial real estate developers. Just as Chinatown’s linguistic landscape is a product of temporal and spatial chasm, the critique of its inauthenticity is also based on an imagined ideal of a “real” Chinatown that must be a maximally different and unfamiliar Other place. Therefore, this study illuminates some of the key socio-historical processes and linguistic, economic, and political resources that flow into the making of Chinatown’s linguistic landscape. In so doing, this multidimensional study illustrates how visual and material language such as linguistic landscape can serve as a bridge between the cultural representation of a place and the political economic processes of its production.
PRactical Application of Research Findings

Ron and Suzie Scollon (2004) emphasize that in nexus analysis, “the processes of change are the results of the activities of the researcher in recording the actions, engaging in discourses with the participants, and constructing new courses of actions” (152). Similarly, Grimshaw (2001) observes that even through research alone, sociolinguists are already engaging in activities that question the assumptions about social structure and processes often taken for granted. In addition, many sociolinguists have gone beyond their own research project and have taken as their responsibility to give back to the community (Wolfram, Reaser and Vaughn 2008) and ameliorating language-based social injustice through education (Rickford, Sweetland, and Rickford 2004; Labov 2008).

During the 18 months of fieldwork in Washington, DC Chinatown, Mr. Wang and Linda often introduced me to new acquaintances as “one of our volunteers” and a university student who is writing her paper on Chinatown. Teaching the weekly ESL class at Chinatown Community Cultural Center was one of the ways that I was able to give back to the “community,” especially to the elderly residents who live in and around Chinatown. Born and raised in Shanghai, I share with them a connection with the same home country. I understand the difficulties of their life in the US even better as I try to imagine my own parents and grandparents who do not understand English at all living in
America on their own. Even though the ESL class could not possibly help them master the English language, it at least ameliorated some of the more urgent situations in which they were in dire need of interpretation and translation help. Occasionally, when they were in despair about never being able to understand English and speak it fluently, I encouraged them by pointing out the fact that their learning a new language at such an advanced age was already an admirable endeavor. These were the only few ways I was able to reciprocate their hospitality and warmth as an extended “family” away from home.

Over time, I also realized that Mr. Wang and other community organizers were also expecting me to be an advocate of their viewpoints and effort in preserving and promoting Chinatown. However, I was cautious in doing so, as I was aware that their agenda was the very subject of my study, and if I was going to offer my opinion, it would have to be an informed one based on a better understanding of all sides of this issue.

Toward the end of fieldwork, I had an opportunity to apply my research findings to a practical project. CCCC applied for a small grant from the DC Humanities Council for a multimedia oral history project documenting the voices of Chinatown. However, the original proposed project could not be carried out due to limited economic and human resources. Another reason is that past projects such as the Washington, DC Chinatown: A Photographic Journal (Lim
1991) had already done much historical documentation work. I was invited to
attend the CCCC Program Board meeting and brainstorm for a new and more
feasible project in October 2008.

As by then, I had my preliminary findings that point to temporal and
spatial disjunctions as the main contributors to Chinatown’s ambivalent place
identity, I suggested that the project funding could be applied to producing a
map of Chinatown that re-embeds in its own local history and highlights Chinese
businesses concentrated in the margins of neighborhood space. Through team
collaborations, the map was designed, printed, and distributed at CCCC within
three months (see Appendix D).

While I contributed the text of a brief history of DC Chinatown to the
project, planning meetings also yielded additional insights into the place identity
of Chinatown. For example, an important question during the meetings was
whether or not the map should highlight non-Chinese Asian American
businesses, for example, the Indian restaurant on 7th Street and the Thai
restaurant on 6th Street. The project team, made up of three younger, second-
generation Chinese Americans and I, decided that the map should include other
Asian American restaurants as they were probably also affected by the
development boom in the neighborhood. Moreover, this decision also reflects an
understanding of Chinatown not tied to Chinese alone as viewed by some older
Chinese people, but a more inclusive place that is defined by a broader ethnic category of Asian Americans. In this way, a community project that applies research findings to a practical solution also benefits my analysis in return. In the following section, I will discuss several ways in which this study contributes to our understanding of several interrelated theoretical issues.

**Theoretical Contributions**

Through a multidimensional study of the linguistic landscape of Washington, DC Chinatown, this dissertation addresses several theoretical issues in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.

First, by going beyond the language policy approach to linguistic landscape, I was able to demonstrate that research on language in society can contribute to our understanding of not only how language and discourse construct place in spatial representations but also how language and discourse shape the production of material space and individuals’ spatial practices. More importantly, I argue that these three aspects of place interact through language and discourse. For example, as we have seen in the analysis, discourse strategies were employed to create a new policy area called “Central Washington” and to deemphasize the ethnic and cultural identities of contained neighborhoods. Motivated by economic benefits, such constructed policy areas pave the way for
the production of material space by increasing real estate development activities. Despite mandatory bilingual signage, the change in material space makes it more difficult for low-income, elderly residents to navigate the neighborhood and thus shapes their spatial practice of detouring around Chinatown. The separation of their activity space from the center of Chinatown creates the impression to many visitors that there are no Chinese people living there, which is then contrasted with the linguistic landscape of Chinatown, a kind of spatial representation different from the urban planning policies, and leads to Chinatown’s ambivalent place identity. It is through a theoretical framework that integrates time and space and through a methodological approach that combines photography, ethnography, interviews, and discourse analysis that we are able to see the interconnection between various forms of language and discourse and all three dimensions of place.

Second, by focusing on linguistic landscape, this study contributes to our understanding of language use in its written, visual and material forms, an area that has been largely neglected in the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, in which speech has been studied as the primary type of data (see Hymes 1996 [1973] and Basso 1974 for critiques). Findings from this dissertation suggest that linguistic landscape as well as the stream of written discourses that flow into its production mediate between spatial representation on the one hand
and material space on the other, precisely because they themselves are simultaneously cultural texts and material objects. Therefore, it points to visual and material forms of language as a fruitful area to further explore the interaction between language and place, and between “words” and “things” (Irvine 1989; Manning 2006).

In short, this dissertation illuminates the temporal processes that shape the linguistic landscape of Chinatown, which further contributes to its ambivalent place identity by way of spatial contrast, conflict, and connection. This research finding is useful for practical community-based projects that aim to restore the discursive equilibrium of the neighborhood. It also demonstrates the productivity of a multidimensional theoretical and methodological approach to visual and material language in bridging the gap between cultural representation and political economy.
APPENDIX A

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA MUNICIPAL REGULATION

CHAPTER 17, TITLE 11, SECTION 1705 “CHINATOWN”
1705 CHINATOWN

1705.1 The principal policies and objectives from the Comprehensive Plan for the Chinatown area are to:

(a) Protect and enhance Chinatown as Downtown's only ethnic cultural area;

(b) Maintain and expand the existing concentration of retail uses emphasizing Chinese and Asian merchandise and related wholesale operations serving residents, visitors, tourists, and business travelers;

(c) Reinforce the area's economic viability by encouraging mixed use development, including substantial housing, cultural and community facilities, offices, retail and wholesale businesses, and hotels; and

(d) Protect existing housing and the most important historic buildings with suitable preservation controls, residential and commercial zones, and economic incentives.

1705.2 This section applies to properties in the following squares: 428, 452, 453, 485, and 486, and those portions of squares 429 and 454 that are north of a line extending the midpoint of G Place eastward from 9th Street to 6th Street.

1705.3 Each building that fronts on H Street from 5th to 8th Street, on 7th Street for a distance of one-half (1/2) block north and south of H Street, or on 6th Street for a distance of one-half (1/2) block south of H Street, shall devote not less than 1.0 FAR equivalent to retail, service, arts, and arts-related uses listed in §§ 1710 and 1711 and wholesaling accessory to those uses, provided that this requirement shall be 0.5 FAR equivalent for a building that fronts on any other street segment in Chinatown or for a building that provides on-site or off-site, a residential component as required by § 1706.

1705.4 In Square 485, a residential building that is brought up to building code and covenanted to continue in residential use for twenty (20) years or longer shall be eligible for transferable development rights equal to the floor area maintained in residential use.

1705.5 A building that provides the required 1.0 FAR equivalent for preferred uses specified in § 1705.3, and that includes any of the bonus uses indicated in this subsection, may count the gross floor area equivalent devoted to such use or uses at the bonus ratio indicated for the purpose of earning bonus density.
APPENDIX B

MAP 16.1: CENTRAL WASHINGTON POLICY FOCUS AREAS

IN 2006 DC COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
APPENDIX C

USER’S GUIDE TO CHINATOWN DESIGN REVIEW

THE DISTRICT OFFICE OF PLANNING
APPENDIX D

MAP OF CHINATOWN PRODUCED BY CCCC

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