

## The Linguistic Landscape of China: A Field-Based Study of an Ancient Town's Historical Precinct

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### Abstract

This study comprises an empirical LL case study in Datong, an ancient town of China. Specifically, it focuses on the top-down (government) and bottom-up (commercial and other) linguistic landscape of historic Lanxi Street as its research setting.

The paper draws on theories of LL studies to examine the use of written language on signs in the public area of a historical street. The study analyzed the differences between official signs and unofficial signs, and to identify characteristics that might be specific to a historic precinct. The researchers compared the linguistic landscape of Lanxi Old Street with an urban commercial street in Tongling City, to examine the differences and their causes between a small, heritage town and a city. Based on a mixed-methods research design, the data of this paper incorporate photographs, interviews and questionnaires, which were analyzed with the help of SPSS. This empirical study sheds light on protect heritage LL to preserve its own characteristics against the flow of globalization and the worldwide domination of English in the context of a sociolinguistics approach.

**Key words:** Linguistic Landscape; Ancient town; Historical street; Heritage linguistic landscape

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years LL research has emerged as a new field of sociolinguistics (Blackhaus, 2007; Ben-Rafael, 2009; Shohamy, 2010). By investigating the characteristics and rules of public space written language in a given locus, LL explores language vitality, competition, policy, influences and effects, and other issues governing and governed by language choice in a given place-in-time.

To date, the majority of linguistic landscape studies has been undertaken in large cities (Huebner, 2006; Backhaus, 2007; Shohamy, 2010). However, there is relatively little research into linguistic landscape in small towns. Accordingly, we have investigated such a place in order to provide a new context and application for analysis of linguistic landscape. Specifically, this study selected a famous historical street as an illustrative example of the linguistic features in this small town. This empirical study suggests that adherence to a traditional linguistic landscape may help preserve a heritage precinct to retain its characteristics against the current of rapid modernization, and the physical, historical precinct may protect traditional language forms, such as traditional Chinese characters and calligraphy, and local dialects, against the world dominance of English and local domination of simplified Chinese characters. These preservation processes inform our understanding of heritage linguistic landscape.

### 1. LITERATURE REVIEW OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

This section will overview and classify and discuss previous studies of LL worldwide.

## 1.1 The Notion of Linguistic Landscape

Since the 1970s, the use of language in the public sphere has attracted wide attention from academia. Masai (1972) noted that the language employed in signs manifests the influence of social, economic, ethnic and historical influences, as well as the widespread use of English on a particular Linguistic landscape. An increasing number of researchers worldwide have demonstrated that the written form of language in the public space presents a metaphorical landscape.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) first coined the terms “linguistic landscape”. They noted that, “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” (p. 25).

Since then, interest has grown in the variety of language texts and the semiotics of ambient signs. Spolsky and Cooper (1991) used the theory of language choice to explicate three rules for choosing a sign's language. They postulated the first two rules as self-evident: “write signs in a language you know” and “write signs in the language readers are assumed to read”. The first relates to the linguistic proficiency of sign writer and the second to the sign reader, that is, audience and purpose. As a third rule, they proposed, “prefer to write signs in your own language” (p. 84). Scollon and Scollon (2003, p. 27-31) proposed the notion of geosemiotics, “the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world”. They developed a holistic approach to study the relations between interaction order (the interface between writer, text and reader), visual semiotics (images, font style and size, and their capacity to carry meaning) and place semiotics (the circumstances specific to a particular LL, placement of the sign etc.). Backhaus (2007) first examined multilingual settings in his work focusing on urban language usage in written mode, defining any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame, which contains more than two languages, as multilingual signage (p. 64).

Special attention is also given by numerous scholars to the distinction of sign types. Calvet (1990) proposed that the components of LL comprise two types of signs, namely “in vitro” and “in vivo” (p.75). Calvet (1994) explained the differences between the two terms: as one is written by an official (e.g. government) authority (such as road signs) and the latter is written by citizens (e.g. shop names). Landry and Bourhis (1997) also undertook comparisons of “government” and “private” signs as essential distinctions within LL (p. 27). They agreed that both government-related signs and private signs contribute to the LL of a given place, and argued that signs set up by governmental agencies constituted official signs, and categorized other signs as unofficial signs (p. 64). Backhaus (2007) distinguished between official and

unofficial multilingual signs in Tokyo. He interpreted their differences in terms of power and solidarity as he commented that language is governed by power relations on official signs while unofficial signs make use of various languages to express solidarity (p. 65).

Gradually, with the further development of LL research, researchers came to focus more on questions such as what contributes to LL formation, the rules and regulations or conventions of language displayed in a certain place, and how local residents create and respond to their LL environment. Trumper-Hecht (2010), a pioneer of LL studies, developed the theory of three dimensions of space proposed by Henry Lefebvre (1991) and regarded LL as a sociolinguistic-spatial phenomenon. He explained that LL, as the visual aspect of space practice, was changing in response to different social contexts, and divided “spatial practice” as follows:

(1) “Physical space” indicating the distribution of language used on signs;

“Conceived space” referring to a “political” dimension that reflected views and ideologies held by different LL policymakers;

“Lived space”, the “experiential” dimension concerning readers’ understandings and interpretations of the signs.

Various publications have set out to address the limitations of prior LL research. Shanna (2015) emphasized that little is said about the functions and status associated with the chosen language displayed in public signage. He argued that past LL studies should not treat all foreign language signs as a homogeneous group, since they perform different functions in LL. For example, he pointed out that although English and French are both assumed as foreign languages in Korea, they may perform different functions based on the content or location of these signs. For example, English signs in airports are considered as information-giving tools while a French sign in a Korean bakery may simply perform as an aesthetic status marker in LL.

Numerous studies have focused predominantly on the “linguistic cityscape” (Backhaus, 2007, p. 23) or “multilingual cityscape” (Shohamy, 2010, p. 75). Shohamy, Ben Rafael, and Barni (2010) verified that there is greater linguistic diversity in an urban place where there is a proliferation of signs. Agnihotri (2010) undertook empirical studies in Montreal, and Belgium, and discerned linguistic conflicts related to commercial signage and place names in multilingual contexts. Particularly in places where different languages vie for primacy, LL can be applied to examine features such as the relationship between language policy and local dialect varieties, or minority languages, such as indigenous languages (Koch & Hercus, 2009).

## 1.2 Linguistic Landscape Research in China

The study of linguistic landscape in China originated from a public signage translation perspective, which sets

it apart from western LL research. Since China's "reform and opening-up policy" commenced in 1978 (Allen, 2008), more and more people accepted the necessity of sign translation in China, resulting in the first standardization of sign translation dictionary: "A Chinese-English Dictionary on Signs" (Lü, 2004). The notion of "gongshiyu" the Chinese equivalent of "public sign" in English, was adopted by Lü (2005), which is the term widely used to study features and functions of public signage. Lü defined "gongshiyu" as "text messages or graphics displayed in written or symbolic form, which perform communicative, warning and a wide range of functions related to the people's daily life" (p. 78). Subsequently, Chinese scholars undertook sign-related research including "gongshi" (publicly displayed government notices), "biaoyu" (slogans with concise words used by the political Party) and "biaoshi" (direction signs issued by government). However the limitation of these studies was observed by Li (2010), who contended that the majority of previous LL studies in China excluded commercial signs, which are an indispensable element of LL in any given place (p. 54).

Currently, large numbers of foreigners visit or reside in China for lengthy periods. As the product of internationalization, empirical LL studies of multilingualism in big cities of China is widespread. For example, Wang (2013) conducted an empirical study to investigate language used on commercial signs in Wangfujing Street, Beijing. This study focused on multilingual LL environments rather than solely on public sign translation or errors. The findings indicated a total of seven languages used in shop signs in this globalized site. Wang pointed out that studying multilingual signs as China's linguistic environment reflects the increasing pace of globalization.

Currently, LL study in China is exploring new possibilities. For instance Ming (2015) summarized research progress and prospects of LL in China. He predicted that the rapid development of economic globalization and urban internationalization will have significant impact on Chinese LL in the new century. He analyzed language in its local context from an LL perspective, and recommended focusing on the effect and influence of language development in the evolution of LL.

Since research focusing on Chinese small towns has received little attention to date, the empirical investigation reported on here helps aims to fill the gap. This paper focuses on the linguistic landscape of an ancient town in China and selected a typical historical street to analyze its language community and characteristics of traditional signs and linguistic ecology, and a comparison with a large city's LL. To our knowledge, no research exists on LL as a means of preserving heritage, or the contribution of heritage sites to the preservation of traditional, and in some cases, disappearing, language forms. This paper will explore related potential.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB-QUESTIONS

(1) How do language signs exemplify the linguistic landscape of Lanxi Street in Datong ancient town?

a. Which Languages predominate in the signs, and why might this be?

b. How many languages are used in each sign, and why?

c. Which forms of Chinese language are used in the sign (i.e. traditional, or simplified characters, or Pinyin (Chinese transliterated into the Latin alphabet), and why?

(2) What are the overall characteristics of the linguistic landscape in Lanxi Street Datong ancient town?

a. What are the linguistic landscape characteristics of both top-down (official) and bottom-up (unofficial) signs?

b. What are the distinctions between top-down and bottom-up signs?

c. What are the differences between a small 'heritage' town and a larger urban linguistic landscape?

(3) How do people respond to the present linguistic landscape environment of this town?

a. What are the sign readers' attitudes toward the frequent appearance of foreign languages in LL as a result of globalization?

b. What are the sign owners' attitudes toward the choice of language displayed on the sign to attract attention in a historical street?

c. Finally, we hypothesized on how a linguistic landscape and a precinct with heritage features might serve to preserve one another.

## 3. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The data collected for this study comprised photographic evidence, compiling inventories of various public signs in situ, as well as distributing two questionnaires, to sign owners (22 copies) and sign readers (30 copies) respectively. During data collection, a total of 187 photos were taken capturing 224 linguistic units (i.e. textual signs).

These linguistic signs were transcribed, then systematically categorized and coded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). This software provided categorical analysis of data we collected.

We adopted Backhaus' (2007) approach to Linguistic Landscape data collection for this study. We gathered images of different kinds of signs such as posters, advertisements, notices, billboards, storefront nameplates, as representative of the distribution of signs in the research site. We adopted a "unit of analysis" proposed by Backhaus (2007, p.45), defined as "one specific specimen of visible language in written text". Hence, each linguistic sign was generally regarded as one single analytic unit of analysis. We then classified these into different types, such as storefront signs, interior signs, bilingual signs,

multilingual signs and others based on multiple criteria including location of signs, the number of languages displayed on the signs and so on.

We particularly selected Lanxi Street as the research site for field work, as an example of a heritage historical street devoted to Datong's ancient town traditional linguistic culture and history. We compared Lanxi Old Street with an urban commercial street in Tongling City in terms of linguistic units, to analyse the way language is displayed in different LLs, and investigated the differences between these two commercial streets.

We also interviewed different groups of people (sign owners and sign readers) in order to gather information including 25 business owners of various shops in Lanxi Street, and a random selection of 12 local residents of different ages and education levels, and approximately 15 visitors, of whom five were visiting from abroad.

We employed qualitative-descriptive approaches with face to face interviews and questionnaire surveys to collect additional data for our study. The selection criteria for interviewees was based on their willingness to participate and share their perspectives concerning a local LL with the researchers.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis was conducted according to the languages used (Chinese, English, Korean, Pinyin etc), Linguistic Landscape patterns (monolingual, bilingual and multilingual patterns of LL), language order (the order in which the different languages are presented) and the assigned status of language signs (official or unofficial), in terms of what these might reveal about presumed audience and purpose of the signs.

**Table 1**  
**Overview of Language Sign Identification**

Attribute of signs	Classification of Language Signs	Quantity (unit)	Proportion (%)
Unofficial Signs	Restaurants/Cafes/Snack bars/bakeries	52	26.31
	Drug stores/grocery stores/supermarkets	41	17.23
	Hotels/taverns/accommodation	32	12.04
	Hairdressers/nail shops/massage parlors	18	8.45
	Travel Agencies/Travel Consulting Stores	9	4.05
	Others (e.g. Real estate agencies etc)	7	3.15
Official Signs	Road signs/ street names/place names	26	11.13
	Public service signs (government offices/museums/banks and other institutions)	14	7.06
	Introductory signboards (Scenic Spot Explanation Signs)	13	6.51
	Public Warning signs	8	3.42
	Others (e.g. traffic signs)	4	0.45

For purposes of easy differentiation, we have categorized Pinyin as a discrete language here. The 224 linguistic units (i.e. signs) in the database comprise 65 official units and 159 unofficial linguistic units. These were qualitatively analyzed for discussion.

Drawing on the language attribute classifications of data in Table 1, the top-down (official) and bottom-up (unofficial) linguistic landscapes were combined in order to map the overall linguistic landscape distribution in Lanxi Street.

#### 4.1 Characteristics of the Top-Down Linguistic Landscape

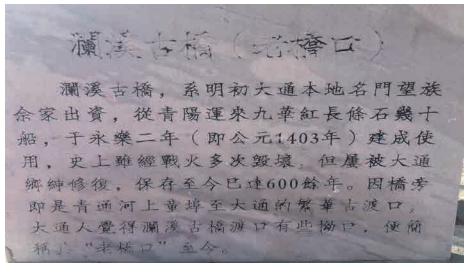
One of the purposes of this empirical study is to analyze the LL of Lanxi Street as shaped by “top-down” and “bottom-up” elements. Specifically, the “top-down” LL refers to those public signs which were issued by governmental organizations and national bureaucracies. We collected and reviewed official linguistic units of Lanxi Street, with the help of SPSS system by using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, to code and categorize the official LL patterns into groups as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Language Composition and Proportion of the Top-Down Linguistic Landscape**

Types of sign	Languages in Linguistic units	Tally of signs	Percentage
Monolingual	Chinese (traditional characters )	10	10.10
	English	—	—
	Korean	—	—
	Pinyin	—	—
Bilingual	simplified Chinese characters+English	17	23.26
	simplified Chinese characters+Korean	—	—
	simplified Chinese characters+Pinyin	5	5.06
Multilingual	Chinese+English+Korean	25	54.53
	Chinese+Korean+Pinyin	8	7.05

With regard to the language types used in the top-down Linguistic landscape, these official linguistic units of data in Table 2 were divided into three groups: monolingual, bilingual and multilingual official linguistic signs. As can be seen in Table 2, the use of Chinese language in all linguistic units accounted for an overwhelming proportion (89.9%) in the observed top-down linguistic landscape of Lanxi Old Street. That is to say that Chinese language is the overwhelmingly dominant language choice for the top-down LL of Lanxi Street.

Figure 1, below, depicts an official signboard providing historic information on the “Lanxi Ancient Bridge”, which is the earliest and most important construction in Datong Old Town. The example shown in figure one is one of the monolingual signboards in Lanxi Street with all information expressed in traditional Chinese characters only, unlike signs in scenic spots, which tend to be bilingual or multilingual. The sign provides a brief history of the bridge.



**Figure 1**  
**Monolingual signboard in traditional Chinese**  
**characterers**

Figures 2 and 3 provide examples of top-down linguistic sample units:



**Figure 2**  
**Chinese+English bilingual sign**

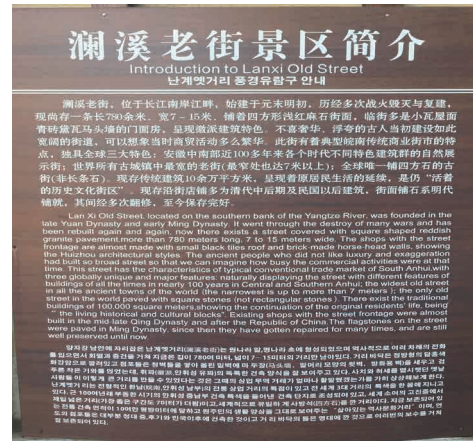


**Figure 3**  
**Chinese+Pinyin bilingual sign**

These Chinese signboards with parallel code-switching in English language or Pinyin introduction were categorized as bilingual units in top-down LL. Based on the rules of preference proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2003) “if two or more than two languages are in the same size, then that which is on the right or on the top of the sign is the main language; if the size is different, the one which is the most conspicuous (biggest or most colorful), is the prominent language on the sign”. Thus, it can be seen that Chinese is the privileged language in such instances.



**Figure 4**  
**Chinese+Pinyin+Korean**



**Figure 5**  
**Chinese+English+Korean**

Figures 4 and 5 provide examples of multilingual units, which contain more than two languages. As can be seen, these multilingual signs combine Chinese, Pinyin or English and Korean to present information. It is worth noting that the Chinese content and other language content are evenly distributed in the above multilingual code-mixing signboards, but the Chinese characters are much larger than the English or other letters or characters. Usually there exists a “code preference” mechanism in both bilingual and multilingual signs since it is impossible to assign both the same space and size in the sign, given the different ‘text lengths’ of various languages. This will inevitably produce a visual hierarchy as shown in figures 4 and 5. Chinese sits atop the visual top-down LL hierarchy.

#### 4.2 Characteristics of the Bottom-up Linguistic landscape

For this component of the research, we compared Lanxi Old Street in Datong town with an urban commercial street in Tongling City in terms of bottom-up linguistic units to analyse the way language is displayed in different LLs and investigated the differences between these two, contrasting commercial streets.

We collected approximately 159 unofficial linguistic units along Lanxi Street (street 1). Meanwhile, we also gathered 150 commercial linguistic units from 85 shops along the high street of Tongling City (street 2). We divided them into several categories: Shopfront nameplates, the formal written name of business shops usually regarded as the main welcome sign; outdoor business signage, such as fascia signs; sidewalk signs; exterior banners or flags for stores; price lists, such as menu boards for a restaurant; business information guides, advertisement banners, and posters.

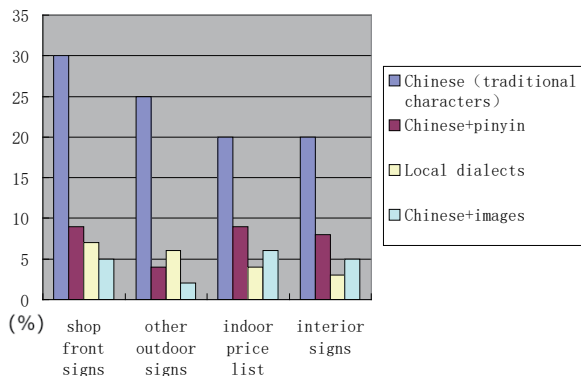


**Figure 6**  
**Storefront signboard (street 1)**



**Figure 7**  
Storefront signboard (street 2)

The above two signboards are the same business type, both are pharmacy shopfront nameplates. Nearly one fifth of unofficial signs in Lanxi Street (street 1) adopt wooden plank signboards, as in Figure 6, which helps to evoke



**Chart 1**  
Distribution of bottom-up language signs in Lanxi Street

Firstly, as the graphs above indicate, Chinese language accounts for a majority of signage in both streets and asserts its dominant position as the state language. However, the use of traditional Chinese characters in Lanxi Street (30.5%) is opposite to a higher proportion of simplified characters (38.2%) of the Tongling commercial street.

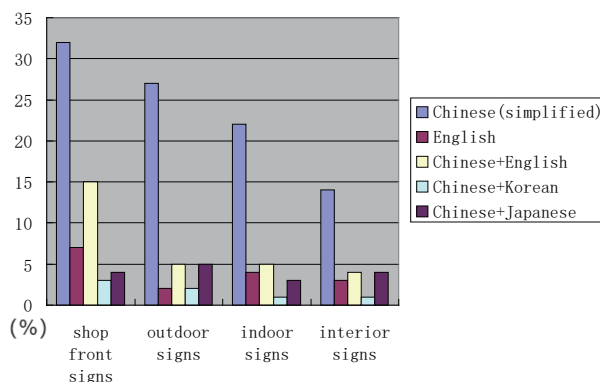
Secondly, monolingual signs in Roman script can be seen in the Tongling commercial street dominated by international famous brands such as “Nike”, “KFC” and “McDonald’s”. The adoption of this monolingual foreign brand signage (12.4%) without Chinese translation, reflected the level of globalization in an urban LL environment. In contrast, the use of traditional Chinese characters combined with Pinyin (14.7%) can be seen in shop signs in Lanxi Street, highlighting Chinese cultural identity while bending to the breeze of LL globalization.

Thirdly, we noted the combination of simplified Chinese characters with foreign languages such as English (20.5%), Korean (5.2%) or Japanese (6.8%) adopted by bilingual or multilingual signs in Tongling City. These signs normally incorporated more than one language and were considerably more numerous than monolingual signs in this commercial street, presumably with an audience of foreign readers in mind.

However, nearly 85.4% of shops in Lanxi Street signaled local specialties and food such as “小磨麻油”

a sense of history, consistent with the use of traditional Chinese characters, and handwriting typefaces featuring attractive calligraphy. By contrast, Figure 7 features a modern bilingual commercial signboard in Tongling city. It uses contemporary digital signage technology such as LED digital signage, as a hallmark of modernity.

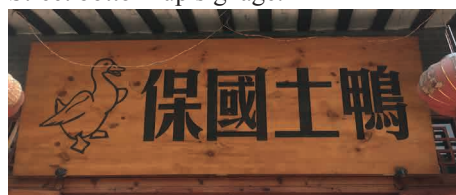
The two charts below illustrate the general distribution of linguistic signs in Lanxi Old Street and an urban commercial street in Tongling City respectively. Although they are each regarded as the business hub for their areas, they feature both similarities and differences in the bottom-up LL.



**Chart 2**  
Distribution of commercial signs in a Tongling street

(sesame oil), or “大通茶干” (a local snack made of dried bean curd). Most of the older shops in this street still maintain traditional features of signage, such as inclusion of local dialects (12.3%), presumably to convey historic authenticity in the Lanxi old street bottom-up LL.

Below are some commercial signs from Lanxi Street illustrating traditional Chinese characters typical of Lanxi Street bottom-up signage.



**Figure 8**  
Zhaopai (signboard)



**Figure 9**  
Huangzi (shop sign)



**Figure 10**  
Shop sign using calligraphic style



**Figure 11**  
Calligraphy shop signboard

In China, the portmanteau “Zhaohuang” represents both “Zhaopai” and “Huangzi”, two common types of signage. According to the Xinhua Dictionary (Yao, 2000) the compound of “Zhaopai” refers to a board on which Chinese characters spell out name of the shop. Taking Figure 8 as an example, “保國土鴨” (Bao Guo Tu Ya), the signboard uses traditional Chinese characters for Baoguo’s Duck Shop. This signboard also features the image of a duck alongside the characters, presumably for the purpose of making it more eye-catching, and comprehensible to a wider audience of passers-by.

“Huangzi”, similar to flags or banners, are old style shop signs hanging on long poles sticking out of the shop front, such as in Figure 9, which are visually prominent in Lanxi street. It is not surprising that the Figure 9 adopts traditional characters “老字號方記”, as Fang’s is a long-established shop and a time-honored brand which enjoys a favourable reputation in this town. The majority of Shop owners in Lanxi Street still opt for this traditional style signage like “Huangzi” to preserve this unique cultural identity which is almost totally absent from the big city commercial street in Tongling.

In recent years, traditional calligraphic signboards have dwindled in numbers, especially in urban streets. These signboards are well preserved in Lanxi Street, and regarded as artistic works that integrate Chinese language, Chinese calligraphy, and Chinese traditional architecture and sculpture. Their loss would constitute a loss of knowledge and heritage value.

As an example of the above, Figure 10 “鐵藝” (Iron art) is a typical calligraphic signboard, many of which adorned this historical street for decades. It adopts traditional characters using Kaishu (‘regular script’), a unique and expressive calligraphic sign writing style which is favoured among sign writers and shop owners in China, and considered to have high artistic value.

In some cases, names of businesses on shop signs in Lanxi Street were inscribed by local famous calligraphers,

literati or leaders such as Figure 11 inscribed by the local celebrity “余應”(She Biao). As a unique form of cultural heritage, this old-style calligraphic signboard “醉夢居”

(four treasures of the study, referring to the four items necessary for calligraphy: brush, ink-stone, ink and paper) adopted traditional characters in Xingshu (cursive script), a robust and dynamic calligraphic sign writing style which enjoys a high reputation among sign writers and shop owners in China. A linguistic feature of this sign, is that it is written from right to left, in contrast with typical modern signage.

These typical traditional signs in Lanxi Old Street are rarely found in big cities. Apart from some basic linguistic functions of signage, these decorative and symbolic signboards convey a unique localized cultural identity in an attempt to convey the historic characteristics of Lanxi Street. Most importantly, under the current process of English language internationalization, these signs counter the trend of globalization and better preserve the heritage LL in Datong ancient town.

### 4.3 Official Document and Survey Findings and Discussion

This section will discuss the political influences that have led to the current LL in Lanxi Street informed by interviews and questionnaire surveys.

#### 4.3.1 Political Influences

Since 2001, the People’s Republic of China has prescribed three main language policies: “the standardization of Chinese”, “the propagation of English” and “the development of minority languages” served as the guidance for normalization of language use in China. Accordingly, “The Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language” was promulgated in 2001 in an attempt to implement these language policies.

Based on the previous analysis of top-down and bottom-up LL in Lanxi Street, Chinese characters always appear in first place on official and unofficial signs. However, all government-related signage in Lanxi Street adopted simplified characters, while the majority of private commercial signs adopted traditional characters. Also, most official signs are bilingual or multilingual, as opposed to typically monolingual commercial signs in Lanxi Street. Consistent with the Law of standard spoken and written Chinese Language: “The standardized [simplified] Chinese characters shall be used as the basic character in the government establishments” (Article 13, Guo & Li, 2017), all official signs in Datong town are written in simplified characters as determined by municipal authorities.

To some extent, bilingual and multilingual LLs respond to the international language environment in China against a backdrop of globalization. In addition, the law of standard spoken and written Chinese language further standardizes bilingual and multilingual signs of

public places, especially in official signage, determined by strict government rules. On the basis of the law that “English and other foreign languages can coexist with Chinese language in official signs to fulfill the needs of government” (Article 8, Guo & Li, 2017), the use of bilingual or multilingual official signs in Lanxi Street not only act as tools of translation, but also cater for foreigners, while reflecting the inevitability of modernization of Datong ancient town.

By contrast, most unofficial signboards in Lanxi Street reflect historical heritage, protected by local government. Survey results and informal conversations indicated that government regulations locally tend to be more flexible, giving shopkeepers some choice in language use.

With a view to cultural heritage conservation of Datong ancient town, the government has instituted “The Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China” (Qian, 2007), with scope for input from local shopkeepers. Based on the above Principles, “all material signs, either artistic or symbolic, with historic significance, are defined as belonging to the cultural heritage” (P. 255-256 [author’s translation]).

#### 4.3.2 Field Survey

We undertook a field survey to investigate 52 respondents’ views on the LL of Lanxi Street. 25 shop keepers, 15 pedestrian tourists of whom five were from overseas, and 12 local inhabitants took part in the survey.

We designed two versions of the questionnaire, one for shopkeepers (that is, sign owners, see Appendix 1), and another for local residents and tourists (sign readers, see Appendix 2) in an attempt to understand their views on Lanxi Street’s signage.

When asked about the factors in choosing the design of their signboards (zhaopai). 25 shop keepers primarily took government regulations into account and were unwilling to convert their existing signboards into modern signage; the vast majority (87.5%) of their signboards, in the form of antique plaques under government heritage protection, had been handed down from generation to generation in their family-owned businesses. Inter-generationally inherited family businesses are less common in larger Chinese cities.

For sentimental reasons, 25 of the shop owners want to preserve their traditional way of making signage out of respect for the history of Lanxi Street. Moreover, from a commercial point of view, 89.6% of sign owners agreed that traditional signage has more commercial value and attraction to customers than modern signage in Lanxi’s historical street.

Meanwhile, questionnaire B (Appendix 2) sought tourists and inhabitants’ attitudes concerning LL, including their various perceptions about language use in signs and their opinions about the importance of maintaining an older style LL in the precinct.

Unsurprisingly, the questionnaires revealed that Chinese

language was the first choice for signboards in Lanxi Street, and was the preference for more local inhabitants (47%) and tourists (45%) than any other languages (see Table 3, below).

**Table 3**  
**Sign Readers’ Preferred Language for Signage in Lanxi Street**

	Chinese	Chinese + pinyin	Chinese + English	Chinese + English + Korean
tourists	45%	11%	24%	20%
inhabitants	47%	36%	9%	8%

In all, 36% of the local inhabitants preferred Chinese + Pinyin over Chinese + English bilingual signs, whereas 76% of foreign tourists expressed a preference for Chinese + Pinyin signs over Chinese + English. Multilingual signs of LL in Lanxi Street attract the attention of tourists support as well as local inhabitants.

The findings of these two questionnaires provided some insights into attitudes of sign owners and sign readers respectively. Maintaining the original LL is considered highly valuable by both international foreign tourists and domestic visitors in Lanxi Street. Five of the 21 tourists interviewed found the traditional signs very appealing, and expressed enthusiasm to learn traditional Chinese characters. Shop owners and local residents reported that the preservation of traditional LL may help preserve a heritage precinct to retain its own heritage features.

## CONCLUSION

This paper undertook a systematic investigation of the top-down and bottom-up LL of Lanxi Street in Datong ancient town, and compared this with LL features of a commercial street in Tongling. By adopting a field-based research design, the study offers a detailed analysis of the written forms of language use, language priority and language distribution in order to determine factors that contribute to such a LL pattern in each of these two precincts. We also garnered locals’, shop owners’ and tourists’ views on the LL.

We infer from our findings, including analysis of official documents, that traditional linguistic landscapes may serve to assist heritage precincts in retaining their historic characteristics, against the tide of rapid modernization and globalization. Similarly the physical, historical precinct may offer sanctuary for older language forms, such as traditional Chinese characters and calligraphy, as well as local dialects, against the global dominance of English, and the domination nationally and locally of simplified Chinese characters or Pinyin. Further investigation of such processes may be of interest to government authorities interested in preserving heritage. While this study may offer only limited generalization, given its small scope, larger scale similar studies may serve to confirm or otherwise our findings here.



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## APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE A

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### Questionnaire Survey (shop owners)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey about sign makers' attitudes towards the Lanxi Street signs. The questionnaire is part of my project Research on the Linguistic landscape of Anhui characteristic towns. Your answers will remain confidential.

#### Section A: General Questions

\_\_\_\_\_  
First name  
Age  
Gender  female  male  
Nationality and Hometown  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Section B: sign makers' Attitudes

1. What is your highest educational level?  
 primary school  middle school  high school  college
2. How many language(s) Can you read?  
 Chinese  English  Korean  Japanese  Others
3. Which language(s) do you think is used most often on your signboards?  
 Chinese  English  Pinyin  Chinese+ English  Others \_\_\_\_\_
4. What language(s) do you think are popular for attracting customers on the signboards?  
 Chinese  English  Japanese  Korean  others \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you want to add another language(s) (besides Chinese) into the signboard?  
 Yes, I do. I want to add \_\_\_\_\_  No, I don't.
6. what is your choice and order of the languages used on the signboards of your shop, you will arrange them as:  
1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you like the current signboards of your shop and why?
8. How important for maintaining traditional Linguistic Landscape of Lanxi Street and why?  
  
What factors contribute to making a qualify commercial sign of Lanxi Street and why?
10. What is your opinion on using languages on the signs of commercial shops and the reason why you choose?

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## APPENDIX 2. QUESTIONNAIRE B

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### Questionnaire Survey (residents and tourists )

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey about sign makers' attitudes towards the Lanxi Street signs. The questionnaire is part of my project Research on the Linguistic landscape of Anhui characteristic towns. Your answers will remain confidential.

#### Section A: General Questions

\_\_\_\_\_  
First name  
Age  
Gender  female  male  
Nationality and Hometown  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Section B: sign readers' Attitudes

1. What is your highest educational level?  
 primary school  middle school  high school  college
2. How many language(s) Can you read?  
 Chinese  English  Korean  Japanese  Others
3. Can you recognize traditional Chinese characters in Linguistic signs of Lanxi Street and to what degree?  
 All of them  much of them  a little  Not at all
4. Which language(s) do you think is used most often of Lanxi Street signboards?  
 Chinese  English  Pinyin  Chinese+ English  Others \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you satisfy with the current top -down and bottom-up Linguistic Landscape of Lanxi Street and the reason?  
 Yes, I do.  No, I don't.

6. What factor(s) do you think are important for constructing the unique Linguistic Landscape of Lanxi Street and why?
7. What are the characteristics of Lanxi Street Linguistic Landscape and the most distinct linguistic feature is?
8. What are the differences of Linguistic landscape between Lanxi Street and other commercial streets you have been visited before?
9. What do you think of bilingual and multilingual language signs in traditional small town's Linguistic Landscape, is it a threat to original forms of LL or not?
10. What are your anticipations and opinions for the future development of LL in Lanxi Street?