

Sinograms on Commercial Signs. A Case Study of Chinese Restaurants in Prague

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Abstract. This paper is a response to the noticeable use of Chinese script in the public space of a country with a relatively small number of Chinese immigrants. The appearance of this linguistic phenomenon in Czechia arises from its significant involvement in the gastronomy business associated with vibrant outdoor branding. Sinograms are one of the most favorite items through which Chinese restaurant label the ethnic origin of the offered food. This study draws on the conceptual framework of linguistic landscape theory and, through visual analysis, reconstructs the graphic and linguistic contexts in which sinograms are displayed on restaurant storefronts. It is based on the photo documentation collected during August 2020 in the capital city of Prague. The sinogram-oriented approach enables a unique outlook on the dynamics of the foreign non-Latin script displayed on commercial signs. The established set of similarities indicates a high level of unity in the marketing of Chineseness through the sinograms.

1. Introduction

Despite the relatively short history of Chinese immigration, Chinese food ranks among the most popular ethnic cuisines in the Czech business establishments serving food. Since running a commercial property is usually associated with outdoor marketing, Chinese restaurants also contribute to shaping public space. The previous onomastic research has, among other things, revealed that the names displayed on the restaurants' outdoor signage communicate with the local consumers through three different languages and two scripts (Slaměňíková, 2023).

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Apart from the Czech and English texts, the official Romanization system Pinyin for the Chinese language is widely popular. In addition, sinograms, i.e., the graphemes of the Chinese writing system, often accompany the Latin script names. Their use is so extensive that despite the fact that Chinese restaurant signs are undoubtedly not the only venue of sinograms in the public space, they are, with high probability, the most common ones. Moreover, despite a lack of statistical data, it appears to be safe to say that sinograms in all probability represented the most common non-Latin script used in the Czech linguistic landscape (LL) at the point of the data collection.

To understand its significance properly, the characteristic features of the Chinese community in Czechia have to be considered. The most recent comprehensive study emphasizes its uniqueness by comparing similar frameworks in Southern and Western Europe, as well as elsewhere in the world (Horálek et al., 2017, pp. 277ff). The attributes assigned to the Czech Chinese community include: being small and young in age¹ (Sluka et al., 2018, p. 89), diverse despite the relatively compact place of origin, evolving in terms of its internal composition (Moore et al., 2001) and geographically dispersed and not very communal (Horálek et al., 2017). The Chinese community in Czechia, however, shares with other countries the reality that the restaurant business is one of the main sectors of activity for Chinese immigrants (ibid). Therefore, although the Chinese community is small, many of these establishments in Czechia can be found. Moore et al. (2001, p. 618) mention that the number of Chinese restaurants in Prague increased from one in 1988 to almost forty in 1994. In addition, a shift in the typology of restaurants can also be observed. While Bakešová (1996, p. 364) responded in the mid-1990s to the objection as to why Czech Chinese restaurants rank among the expensive establishments, Horálek et al. (2017, p. 269) two decades later wrote that most of the several hundred restaurants run throughout Czechia are 'low-cost' restaurants offering dishes that have been altered to suit Czech tastes.

Apart from the small Chinese community, proficiency in the Chinese language in Czechia is limited to a relatively small number of sinologists and other specialists in Chinese studies, graduates of Chinese language courses with varying levels of expertise, and probably also some Chinese

1. Former Czechoslovakia opened its border for Chinese migration only in the 1990s (Obuchová, 2002, p. 9). The Chinese flow after the fall of the Iron Curtain came about within the so-called 'new wave' of Chinese international migration that began in the late 1980s (cf. Liu, 2005). Statistics indicate that Europe, in particular, has become an increasingly attractive destination for Chinese immigrants (Latham et al., 2013, p. 18). Although Czechia accounts for only a tiny part of the total, the growth rate of the Chinese population has increased significantly. Horálek et al. (2017, p. 269) identify the period between 1991 and 1995 as the Chinese boom during which the number of Chinese rose sixteen times from 261 to 4,210.

culture enthusiasts. Because of this, the high frequency with which sinograms appear in the public space is a phenomenon that attracts academic interest. This study aims to describe the status of sinograms in the Czech public space. Leaning on the theoretical background of LL studies, this paper documents the pragmatic functions of sinograms emerging from the context in which they are utilized.²

2. Theoretical Background and Research Approach

Displaying signs on the premise's front area is essential to the restaurant's branding. It is driven by the interest in directing passers-by's attention to a conducted business. To succeed in a highly competitive environment, restaurants are forced to select devices that catch the eyes of passers-by and, ideally, attract them enough to decide to become customers. Ben-Rafael (2009: 44ff) defines two major structuration principles that constitute the linguistic landscape in the central urban areas. Although they are the opposite of each other, the social actors who participate in the formation of LL are always, in a certain way, bound to adopt both of the strategies pertaining to these principles. The principle of "presentation-of-self" refers to a situation when numberless actors seek new original ways of promoting themselves and try to establish a unique signature that palpably distinguishes them from the other LL actors. This tendency grows stronger in areas with a higher density of LL items that even more notably inspire the use of unexpected devices. The "good-reasons" principle emerges from the same situation. Since actors address the same group of potential clients, they also cannot avoid adjusting their promotion techniques, including designing LL items, to align with people's expectations, values, or tastes. To achieve this, they may be induced to utilize cultural codes perceived as fashionable in the public eye or to present favorable images of themselves to others.

Language choice is one of the procedural steps underlying the preparation of any LL item. It is also one of the utterances that have the capacity to be used by the actors in favor of both of the above-mentioned principles. Spolsky (2009, pp. 34ff) describes the use of language on advertising signs as "a fine interplay" between the so-called "presumed reader's condition" and the "symbolic value condition." The rule, which the first of them is based on, states that one should have a preference for a language the presumed readers can understand to accomplish the communicative goals. The second condition emerges from the rule that one should select his or her own language or the language with which

2. The author of the paper would like to express gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of the original conference paper proposal. Their thoughtful suggestions were helpful in specifying the study objectives.

one wants to be identified. In this case, the choice of a particular language is motivated by the aim of evoking a specific association. Spolsky points out that advertisers apply both of these strategies when designing advertising signs. Edelman (2009, pp. 142ff) describes the same phenomenon in the way that she distinguishes two reasons standing behind the use of a particular language, i.e., transmitting factual information and appealing to people's emotions through the connotational value of languages. Edelman adopts the term "impersonal multilingualism," established by H. Haarman (1986), to refer to contexts when foreign languages are used in favor of the second reason. Cook (2013) highlights that a foreign language lends the place a certain ambiance while preferring the term "atmospheric multilingualism."

The language situation in Czechia allows for presuming that sinograms on Chinese restaurants in Prague serve a symbolic rather than a communicative function. Sinograms do not 'index' the Chinese-speaking community within which they are used: it is not their geophysical placement that makes their meaning; their meaning is made by "representing something else" (Scollon et al., 2003, p. 133). Through their use, restaurants evoke an image of a different world and, thus, assert the exotic style of their cooking. According to Haarmann (1986, p. 109), "[I]anguage is the most immediate element of ethnic identity for ordinary people." Since graphic representation is an inherent part of any written language, sinograms can be seen as a direct embodiment of Chinese culture, building a link connecting food practice with ethnic identity in this particular area of usage. The question that arises is how specifically the symbolic value of sinograms on Chinese restaurant signage is constructed.

What is apparent at first glance is that sinograms are not the only linguistic code constituting the image of how the restaurants present themselves in the immediate public space. Moreover, they are rarely the only linguistic item displayed on a single sign. It therefore would seem essential to establish how they are integrated into an aggregation of linguistic systems on the storefronts. Considering the main topics investigated within the field of study on multilingual discourses in public space, two fundamental issues deserve attention. The first addresses the reader-oriented arrangement between different languages and the range of information each provides. Reh (2004, pp. 8ff) distinguishes between four types of multilingual writing: a) duplicating writing provides all the information in all languages; b) fragmentary writing displays a partial translation of the full text in one language; c) overlapping writing repeats only one part of the text in more languages, while the other parts are provided in one language only; d) complementary writing provides different information in each language. Simply speaking, any sinogram (or even a graphic unit resembling a sinogram) can create the desired allusion, yet, they are not nonsensical or randomly chosen. Thus, despite

the primarily symbolic function, the denotational meaning is a significant aspect of the usage of sinograms that needs to be discussed. In addition, an essential part of it is the typology of the ideas that are chosen to be transmitted or, in contrast, kept hidden from the local community. The second issue concerns the visual treatment of sinograms in relation to other linguistic codes. Although the visual weight of elements in a graphic composition is not objectively measurable, the information value of each of them results from their mutual interaction, which can be determined by various factors, such as placement in the composition, size, or color contrast (Kress et al., 2006, pp. 201ff).

In light of the two above-mentioned principles of LL structuration, Ben-Rafael (2009, p. 50) argues that food and restaurant establishments mainly target the recurrent needs of the local clientele and are therefore more likely to leverage cultural branding strategies that respond to the good-reasons principle. In light of this, this paper searches for repetitive patterns that might indicate a sociocultural unity in the visual communication of sinograms. It has also been observed that the global marketization of ethnicity and commodification of culture seems to have significantly impacted the development of LL in urban environments since the late twentieth century (Leeman et al., 2010a). This is also the case with Chinese ethnicity, which is often used as a marketable resource promoting exotic potential. According to Ang (2016, p. 261), “Chineseness became an object of commodification, which is often self-commodification” in western Chinatowns. Given this reality, the present paper also sheds light on the mechanisms through which one of the primary Chinese identity markers is commodified for marketing purposes.

3. Research Corpus and Methodology

The data collection was undertaken in the capital of Czechia. It was a reasonable choice because migrants mainly chose Prague as the place to settle down during the Chinese boom of the 1990s (Moore et al., 2001, p. 614). Data are composed of Chinese restaurants located in all ten districts of Prague. As mentioned in the introduction, the photo documentation of the Chinese restaurant exterior was initially taken to examine the restaurant naming practices.³ In its processing, the vast popular-

3. The author of this text would like to express her appreciation to two students from the Department of Asian Studies, Palacký University in Olomouc, namely Mgr. Michaela Frydrychová and Bc. Terezie Kadlecová, for collecting this photo documentation in August 2020. The different purpose of their collection was not associated with a high demand on quality. For this reason, the photos used in the figures in this paper were retaken in September 2022 by the author.

ity of sinograms displayed on the outdoor signary inspired a new approach to the data set that targets the foreign script elements shown in the restaurant signage. A sample of 120 Chinese restaurants, displaying at least one sign with sinograms, was examined. Restaurants located in shopping malls, pedestrian underpasses, and passageways through a building were not included in the analysis in cases when their front window was not visible from the street view.

To achieve its goals, this paper employs methods of visual analysis that represent an inherent part of the LL study (cf. Scollon et al., 2003). It should be pointed out, however, that the adopted approach deviates from its traditional sphere of interest which usually embraces the full spectrum of linguistic items displayed on a geographically coherent whole. In contrast, this study focuses on one specific constituent observed on one particular segment of objects in many separate locations. It is also not motivated by the traditional aim of measuring linguistic diversity in multilingual contexts (cf. Landry et al., 1997). It aspires to establish the status of one specific foreign linguistic phenomenon in an essentially monolingual country. Applying the primary classification designed by Barni et al. (2009), the analyzed segment is characterized by an external position and location in both central and peripheral urban areas; it belongs to the public domain and its subcategory catering. Taking into account Scollon et al.'s (2180ff) categorization of texts in urban spaces, the discussed constituent is displayed on commercial signs. These signs are private in terms of authorship (cf. Landry et al., 1997) and bottom-up in terms of the source they stem from (cf. Ben-Rafael et al., 2006).

Using a quantitative approach, this study first isolates the occurrences of the foreign script elements on the analyzed segment and, second, focuses on the most frequent sources of sinograms and describes the linguistic and graphic context in which they operate. It attempts to identify the recurrent strategies developed in constructing the symbolic function of sinograms. After reviewing the collected photo documentation, a set of three research perspectives was established to classify the data: 1) placement of the sinograms on the bounded physical space of the restaurant fronts; 2) semantic content of the writing in sinograms and its relationship to writings in other languages; 3) graphic presentation of sinograms within multilingual signage. The first perspective perceives the restaurant storefront as the research unit. After reviewing the spectrum of semantic contents, the second perspective transfers its attention to the arrangement of multilingual writing on a single sign. The same object is being targeted while approaching the data from the third perspective. The numbers in the brackets, used throughout the paper, indicate the total amount of the currently described facts.

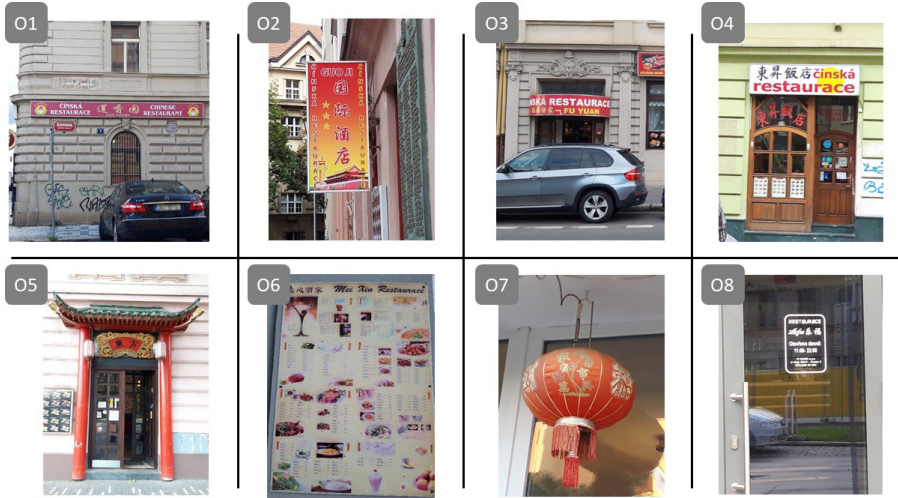


FIGURE 1. Objects displaying sinograms

4. Findings

4.1. Sinograms and Emplacement

Chinese restaurants in Prague are not concentrated in one specific location but are dispersed all around the city. Apart from several kilometers-long avenues, they are rarely placed on the same street. All the analyzed restaurants use a complex set of visual formats on their storefronts through which they differentiate themselves from the surroundings, including physical manifestations of language such as sinograms. This section explores the location of sinograms in the composition of signage. The list below summarizes the types of objects where sinograms are displayed. Examples of each of them are provided in Figure 1.

- O1. Upper wall signs: plates in a shape of a longer dimension horizontal rectangular fastened parallel to the wall and located in the upper part of the building's first floor.
- O2. Overhanging signs: signs attached to a building in a way that projects over the street.
- O3. Other large-size signs: a) signs of different formats attached to other parts of the building; b) mounted sinograms attached to a wall surface or erected over the top of the roof; c) permanent freestanding signs.
- O4. Window signs: sinograms painted on the windows.
- O5. Chinese architectural elements: sinograms displayed on an entry in the form of a traditional Chinese gate.

O6. Menus.

O7. Chinese decorative artifacts: sinograms written on lanterns hanging outside the building. Apart from this, the sinograms are sometimes on other Chinese artifacts (vases, statues, lanterns, knot decorations) located in the restaurants' interiors, which are also clearly visible through the window.

O8. The statement of the place of business⁴.

Generally, the amount of signage displayed on any commercial premise is influenced by its location. Chinese restaurants in corner buildings often place, for example, the same signs on both sidewalls. Restaurants in freestanding buildings sometimes even exploit the potential of placing the sign on the roof. Most of the analyzed restaurants run their business, however, in a building closely surrounded by other buildings in the street. Thus, using multiple signage is simply one of their promoting techniques. In a few cases, the front of the building is separated by a front yard from the street, and signage is also located on the front yard fence.

Table 1 shows how many signs with sinograms can be found in an individual restaurant. It is centered on the objects visible from the street vantage point, not the small items recognizable only in close proximity to a restaurant. This parameter applies to objects provided under the numbers O1 to O5 in the above list. As can be seen, restaurants often display sinograms on at least two signs. The most productive is a combination of an upper wall and an overhanging sign that applies to both groups with multiple signage.

TABLE 1. Number of signs

Number of signs	Total	Types of signs	Total
One	31	O1	11
		O2	13
		Other signs	7
Two	50	O1 + O2	24
		Other combinations	26
Three or more	39	O1 + O2 + any other sign	16
		Other combinations	23

4. According to the Czech Trade Act, every establishment intended for provision of services to customers must be permanently and visibly marked from outside. The law does not specify what a sign should specifically look like. It is quite common to mark the place of business on the entrance door. Some of the Chinese restaurants provide the restaurant name in sinograms as well.

4.2. Sinograms and Information Arrangement

Sinograms are rarely the only unit displayed on a single sign. Most are implemented in a complex composition of items in different linguistic codes. This section explores the interaction of sinograms with these codes. First, it classifies the meaning that is communicated through sinograms. Second, it explores to what extent the message in sinograms is shared by means understandable by the local community and characterizes the features of not transmitted ideas. Third, it evaluates the role of sinograms from the perspective of Reh's (2004) arrangement of multilingual writing.

Sinograms displayed on storefronts are not randomly chosen graphemes. They usually transmit complex pieces of information. These messages can be divided into five groups:

M1. Name (111).

This type of message can be found on all the objects listed above. Generally speaking, a restaurant name can be composed of two parts. An obligatory part, the so-called specifics, identifies the particular commercial establishment. A facultative part, the so-called generics, refers to a general class of names, i.e., a place where meals are prepared and served to customers. Only about half of the restaurant names in sinograms (58) in the analyzed sample contain both the specifics and the generics. The generics in sinograms are represented by different Chinese words expressing the concept of a restaurant, i.e., 饭店 (36), 酒家 (7), 酒店 (5), 酒楼 (3) and 食府 (1), or specifying the sort of offered dishes, i.e., 快餐 (5) 'fast food' and 美食 (1) 'delicious food.' The specific parts of the names proceeding the generics are semantically heterogeneous. In general, the choice of lexical units follows the recommended strategies for the restaurant or commercial names described in different Chinese handbooks for name creation (e.g., Chen et al., 2011, pp. 279ff; Dong, 2012, pp. 193ff; Mao et al., 2003, pp. 94ff). The names also demonstrate similarities with the tendencies observed for brand names regarding the importance of positive connotations (cf. Basciano, 2017; Chan et al., 1997; Chan et al., 2001; Chan et al., 2009).

M2. Names or types of dishes (14).

The occurrence of this type of message is limited to O6 menus. The different approach to fixed-price meals (including side dishes, usually served during lunchtime) and non-fixed food items (offered all day long) is of interest. The use of sinograms is limited to the latter. Some menus only attach sinograms to selected meals or general categories.

M3. Type of business (8).

The text in sinograms provides a hint about the type of business (which is not part of the name), e.g., 中餐厅 'Chinese restaurant,' 川

菜 ‘Sichuan cuisine,’ or a two-line text 中式佳肴 ‘Chinese delicacies’ (first line) and 家的味道 ‘home-style flavor’ (second line). This type of message was observed on objects O1, O2, and O3.

M4. Wishes for prosperity and good fortune (5).

The desire for auspiciousness pervades many levels of everyday life in Chinese culture, including business activities. A practical way to secure its steady flow is to display auspicious symbols, such as the sinogram 福 ‘good fortune.’ Another widespread practice is based on materializing relevant sayings while writing them down, e.g., a four-sinograms structure 恭喜發財 ‘May you be happy and prosperous.’ Locations for this type of message include objects O1, O4, O5, and O7. The total number provided in the category headline takes account of objects displayed in the restaurant exteriors. Interior objects with a different visibility through the window are not included.

M5. Other (3).

This group includes decorative elements in restaurant logos other than restaurant names, e.g., the sinogram 味 ‘taste’ over the steam rising from a bowl.

Since Chinese is a language primarily unfamiliar to the local community, the question arises as to what extent the messages in sinograms are communicated in a language Czechs can understand. Messages of M4 and M5 are provided only in sinograms. In the case of M3, the amount of transmitted information is based on the complexity of the text: simple terms referring to the type of business are usually also provided in Czech or English; more detailed descriptions only appear in sinograms. M2 messages are mostly simultaneously offered in Czech, in many cases also in English and occasionally in German. The most common order in sinograms is sinograms—Czech—English—German. The extent to which the Latin script texts represent direct or loose translations varies among the dishes and restaurants and is a topic for a separate research paper due to its high complexity. The largest group of M1 restaurant names shows significant differences as concerns the specifics and generics which are, therefore, discussed separately.

The generics are often also a part of the Czech name (49). The Czech nomenclature is not as developed, however, as in sinograms. It is limited to the Czech version of the international term restaurant and two terms capturing the quick-service concept. It is also not unusual that the Czech generics is supplemented or even replaced by an English one. What has to be pointed out is that the Czech or English generics are repeatedly extended by the attribute ‘Chinese’ or ‘China.’ The same construction is often part of the Czech name even when the generics are not included in sinograms. This practice can be seen as additional evidence that designing signs is driven by the aim to clearly mark the origin of dishes.

Contrary to the generics, the message hidden in the specifics is rarely transmitted in Czech. The reason is that the name-givers prefer the official Romanization system Pinyin while providing the name in Latin script. Table 2 summarizes the practices as to how the specifics are transliterated. Proper names of geographical origin are displayed separately. This is because it is impossible to draw a strict line between names of well-known destinations and names that may not be recognized as Chinese toponyms by Czechs. As can also be seen, the Czech or English specifics are not necessarily word-by-word identical to the name in sinograms. Finally, five restaurants display the specific part of their name only in sinograms without offering their Latin script version.

TABLE 2. Latin Script versions of the specifics in sinograms

Category	Total	Subcategory	Total	Examples
Pinyin	67	Fully identical	67	福达 <i>Fu Da</i>
Czech	15	Fully identical	6	莲花 <i>Leknín</i> ('lotus flower')
		Partly identical	9	红樱桃 ('red' + 'cherry') vs. <i>Třešeň</i> ('cherry')
English	7	Fully identical	4	阳光 <i>Sunshine</i>
		Partly identical	3	明月楼 ('bright' + 'moon' + 'building') vs. <i>Moon</i>
Toponym	17	Pinyin	13	扬子江 <i>Yang Zi Jiang</i>
		Other	4	四川 vs. <i>S'chuan</i> (non-standard transliteration)
None	5	None	5	悠悠阁

In sinograms, most specifics are refined combinations of carefully chosen linguistic units that evoke culturally grounded positive connotations. They are expressed through explicit references to good fortune, prosperity, and enjoyment or culturally shared auspicious symbols, especially plants and precious substances. Name-givers also like to allocate these expectations to a particular place as a symbolic substitute for the restaurant itself. Taking into account the limited occurrence of the Czech specifics, it is clear that only a tiny portion of these motifs can be shared with the host country through the local language. Table 3 divides the used linguistic units into several semantic groups. The left side of the table lists the concepts abstracted from the Czech specifics. The right side summarizes the most common ideas transmitted only in sinograms. Names covering more semantic groups are numbered in each of the semantic groups.

The table demonstrates that the reference to a place with a certain ambiance is much more developed in sinograms. Apart from this, the

TABLE 3. Transmitted and hidden ideas

Transmitted ideas	Hidden ideas
Plant motifs (7) Garden (4) Pleasant smell, pearl, happiness, harmony, new age (1)	Positive expectations: – Prosperity, abundance, wealth (16) – Happiness, good fortune (14) – Pleasure, joy (10) Places with a certain ambiance: – Garden (9), building (7), pavilion (5) – Home, family (6) Auspicious symbols: – Precious substances (5) – Animals (3)

Czech specifics almost omit literal implications of positive expectation. Instead, they show the somewhat surprising popularity of motifs related to the world of flora where one would not expect the local audience to translate their often exceedingly manifold symbolic status in Chinese culture (cf. Slaměniková, 2023).

The previous description was sinogram-oriented. From the point of view of the arrangement of multilingual writing, the way the generics are displayed on the signs mainly matches the category of fragmentary writing. The complete information includes the derivate of the term China and is provided in Czech or English. The arrangement of the specifics encounters the problem of how to evaluate the different graphic representations of the same language. Pinyin duplicates the message provided in sinograms. Swapping sinograms for Latin script letters is merely, however, a formal adaptation that does not involve a meaning transfer. In fact, the effect is precisely the opposite. Once dissociated from the sinograms, Pinyin names become ambiguous due to the high level of homophony in Chinese. Thus, the relationship between sinograms and Pinyin cannot be considered duplicating. The exceptions are the specifics designating Chinese toponyms, in which case it is a common practice to incorporate them without translation into Czech. Finally, the arrangement between the specifics provided in sinograms and Czech/English is based on the amount of their identity, either duplicating or fragmentary.

The arrangement, however, of the specifics and the generics, as a coherent whole displayed on one sign, is more complex. One part of its structure is communicated in sinograms, and one part is in Latin script. The following schema summarizes the combinations that the unit in fo-

cus, i.e., the specifics in sinograms, create with the other items involved. The dashed line indicates a facultative item. The schema also depicts the two most common combinations. The first of them belong to overlapping writing: there is only one element shared in both Chinese and Czech/English, i.e., the type of business. As mentioned above, Pinyin is not helpful in terms of the transmission of information. In the case of the second combination, the languages complement each other.

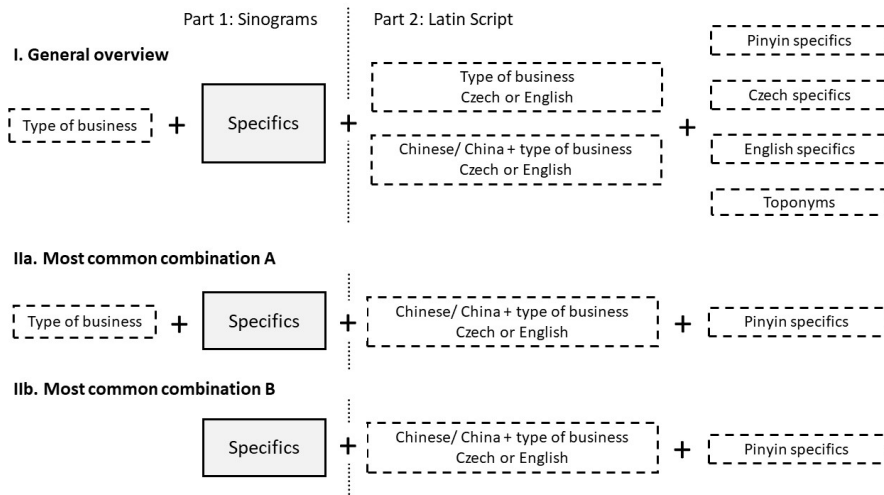


FIGURE 2. Sinogram-centered overview of script and language combinations

4.3. Sinograms and Graphic Design

This section explores how sinograms are communicated graphically. Targeting the O1 signs and those O3 signs situated at a height above the window or higher, it describes the spatial context of the sinograms within a particular sign and the use of typographic devices. The discussed signs have a horizontal rectangular shape, usually with straight lines, but two signs are arc-shaped. Rather than provide a comprehensive picture, this section searches for repeated patterns indicating the most common choices for displaying sinograms on storefronts.

As far as the placement of sinograms is concerned, the following four groups can be distinguished. Figure 3 provides an overview of the most common patterns, including examples of the actual signs. The graphic representations of the patterns have to be understood as simpli-



FIGURE 3. Most common layout patterns

fied schematic versions that do not attempt to depict the accurate proportions of the demarcated parts of the pattern. For practical reasons, they also refrain from capturing the potential visual aids or occasional small-size texts that merely supplement the main linguistic items of the sign.

- (a) Sinograms attached to a logo (13)
 LG: Logo is usually located on the left side of the sign, and the font size of sinograms is relatively tiny.
- (b) Sinograms on the sign with a horizontal layout (37)
 The two most common patterns were identified:
- H1 (17): The sign has a three-column layout displaying sinograms in the middle and the Latin script on the left and right sides. The Latin script texts on the sides are either complementary to each other, e.g., one of them provides the generic part and the other the specific part of the name; or they duplicate the same information in Czech and English. A variant of this pattern marked as H1b (9) includes the more minor size specifics in the Latin script placed under the larger size sinograms.
 - H2 (10): The sign has a two-column layout in which one of the columns is split into an upper and lower part. Sinograms either occupy the prominent non-divided column (H2a) or are located in one of the smaller blocks in the divided column (H2b).

(c) Sinograms on the sign with a vertical layout (27)

The vertical structure shows a high degree of diversity and includes two-, three- and sometimes even more-level patterns. Only one of them appears with a higher frequency:

- V1 (10): the sign utilizes a two-level pattern with sinograms placed on the left or right side of the lower part divided into two columns. The upper part is occupied by the Czech generics that represents the most common item located on the highest level on all the signs with a vertical layout.

(d) Sinograms on other signs (11)

These signs possess unique complex layouts with horizontal and vertical levels pervading one another.

As can be seen, the organization of entities on the sign usually exhibits a hierarchical structure. It is not unusual that sinograms are displayed in a larger font and thus represent the most eye-catching item (34). This is how, for example, the entities on an H1 sign and an H2a sign are mainly implemented. Another favorite practice can be observed in the examples of H2b and V1 patterns: sinograms are less prominent, but their level in the hierarchy is identical to another entity (13). It is also quite common that neither of the items appears to be favored through its typographic qualities, especially on signs with a vertical layout. Sinograms are rarely placed on the highest level and, thus, following the code preference criteria developed by Scollon et al. (2003, pp. 116ff), do not represent the most prominent code. Despite this fact, it should be highlighted that signs with proportionally much smaller sinograms appear relatively rarely (14). In most cases, they are visually significant enough to be distinct from a physical distance.

Using typographic devices demonstrates strong preferences in color and Chinese writing style. Restaurants often choose red and yellow/gold, representing Chinese culture's lucky colors.⁵ Red is the most common background color (47). Texts in white and yellow usually supplement it: they are used either individually for the whole text (white 11, yellow 4) or, more often, combined in a way that they somehow distinguish texts of different linguistic codes (30). The most common non-red backgrounds include white to light grey (11), black (10), and yellow (7). At least one part of the text is provided in red on most of these signs. As concerns the sinograms, they appear in five different colors in all: yellow (33), red (23), white (22), black to dark blue (9) and green (1).

In Chinese calligraphy, sinograms can be written according to several writing styles whose origin is linked to the historical development of Chinese script. The analysis of the most prominent sign of each

5. Red is the national color associated with good fortune and happiness; yellow/gold is the royal color that symbolizes prosperity (cf. Williams, 1976, pp. 76ff).

restaurant has revealed that Chinese restaurants in Prague prefer the graphically abbreviated semi-cursive script (73) over the modern standard regular script (44). Brush leaves the paper less often in semi-cursive writing and as a result, strokes tend to run into one another. The text is more decorative but, at the same time, less legible. The appearance of ancient clerical and seal script is limited to single units. In addition, restaurants also take into account the two versions of sinograms emerging from the script reforms in the last century. It has been observed that most restaurants prefer simplified sinograms. The use of their older pre-reform version, i.e., traditional sinograms, is limited to 11 restaurants.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the rectangular shape of signs is not suitable for vertical writing, i.e., a text vector that also enjoys overall popularity in Chinese texts. Chinese restaurants in Prague sometimes utilize this arrangement on overhanging and window signs. Another script-specific form of visual communication, i.e., right-to-left writing, is limited to two traditional gate signs.

5. Discussion

Sinograms are an essential part of restaurants' branding. The fact that they rarely appear in the Czech public space makes them a powerful tool through which geographically dispersed Chinese restaurants compete for visibility in the linguistic landscape. Responding to the self-presentation principle, restaurateurs place themselves in contrast with surrounding establishments. At the same time, preference for certain practices indicates that sinograms also represent a sociocultural clue operating in favor of the good-reasons principle. The examination of sinograms' interaction with other linguistic elements on different storefronts has revealed a range of similarities that can be described as follow:

1. Reiteration.

Sinograms are often displayed on at least two large-size signs. Regarding the typology of signs, the occurrence of sinograms on an upper wall sign and an overhanging sign is the most significant. An essential attribute of most signs is multilingualism.

2. Exclusive content.

The arrangement of the multilingual writing on signs displaying the sinograms mainly varies from overlapping to complementary. The information transmitted in all languages involved is mostly limited to the generic term identifying the type of business. As has been demonstrated, however, the relationship between the elements provided in the foreign Chinese writing system and the local Latin script

is more complex. The reason for this is linked to the popular practice of how the specific parts of the restaurant names are established. Most of them are transliterated and thus represent semantically empty versions of the originally carefully chosen names in Chinese. In other words, an attempt to converge with the local community in terms of the form but not the content is apparent.

3. Typification in the visual appearance.

Signs with sinograms demonstrate a high degree of unity in graphic design. Elements provided in different linguistic codes are physically separated, and the layout of the signs decomposes into several main parts, each represented by a visually prominent linguistic entity. The analyzed rectangular-shaped signs favor two horizontal patterns and one vertical pattern. The most popular placement of the sinograms is the central position in a graphically symmetrical horizontal layout. Although not necessarily the most salient items, sinograms frequently compete for passers-by's attention through visually appealing typographic qualities. Signs with sinograms are characterized by the three most frequent colors: red, yellow and white. Finally, restaurants tend to utilize the writing style with a higher decorative effect.

These three points summarize how the symbolic value of sinograms is predominantly constructed and imply a certain unity in the marketing of Chinese ethnicity on restaurant storefronts in Czechia. In addition, some of the findings are congruent with the use of Chinese in multilingual regions. Red and yellow/gold were observed, for example, as two colors pervading the outdoor signage and menu designs of two case study restaurants in Paris Chinatowns (Lipovsky et al., 2019, p. 227). Interestingly, green as a third color, prevailing on the color schemes across Chinese-run establishments in Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown (Lou, 2007, p. 188), is almost omitted on the Czech Chinese restaurant storefronts. The author of the research in Washington D.C. also observed, however, the popularity of the horizontal symmetrical layout of the signs (*ibid*, p. 181). Generally speaking, its popularity can be attached to the perception of the central composition as the fundamental organizing principle in Chinese visual semiotics (*cf.* Kreuss, 2006, p. 195). Lou (2007, p. 181) distinguishes between two basic strategies for designing these signs, i.e., splitting the Chinese name or its repetition. They are, to a certain extent, also adopted by Czech Chinese restaurants, with, however, a significant difference. Sinograms are displayed as the central item surrounded by split Latin script texts. Using both simplified and traditional sinograms indicates that designing a sign involves choosing between two orthographies, typical for places with a long history of Chinese immigration (*cf.*, Lou, 2007; Shang et al., 2017). The strong preference for simplified sinograms in Czechia corresponds with the fact that the Chinese immigrants who left mainland

China after the language reforms are less likely to have an emotional attachment to traditional sinograms. At first glance, this strategy might seem to support Lipovsky et al.'s (2019, p. 226) finding involving prioritizing legibility over tradition in Paris. The more vigorous vitality of the semi-cursive script over the standard script indicates, however, a desire for decorativeness over ease of reading.

Contrary to the similarities in the visual appearance, the pragmatic meaning of writings in sinograms, displayed in Chinese restaurants in Prague, is shaped with a somewhat different dynamic. One of the main issues pervading the studies conducted in areas with historically concentrated Chinese people is a shift in code preference resulting from the change in power relations over time (e.g., Leeman et al., 2009; Lou, 2007, 2010; Lipovsky et al., 2019; Shang et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). The emphasis is therefore placed on the interaction of Chinese with the language of the territory surrounding the Chinese enclave or with other official languages of the region, and, to a lower or higher extent, it is driven by an interest in determining the proportion between its communicative and symbolic function. The situation in Czechia is different. The relatively small Chinese population does not cluster in close geographic spaces. Horálek et al.'s (2017, p. 269) comment that most Chinese restaurants alter the offered dishes to please Czech tastes implies their focus on Czech customers. The primarily symbolic function of sinograms does not exclude, however, their communicative role for a potential Chinese clientele. The signs are polysemous and, thus, impart different messages to different groups of viewers. In this respect, the research undertaken in areas with a high concentration of Chinese population highlights the mainly informative content of the text in sinograms for Chinese speakers (cf. Leeman et al., 2010b, p. 179; Lipovsky et al., 2019, p. 227; Lou, 2010, pp. 101ff; Shang et al., 2017, p. 195). Sinograms on the Chinese restaurants in Prague often do not express any factual information since they represent a proper name in the vast majority of its occurrences (cf. Edelman, 2009, p. 151). What seems to be more prominent is the attempt to please the Chinese clientele with the selections of favorable specifics that meet the manifold requirements of commercial name designing. Compared to European naming practices, an interesting component of the Chinese onomasticon is that, apart from designing the name with the aim of evoking a particular image of the restaurants directed to the customers, the message hidden in the name can contain a wish for good fortune and prosperity in business directed to the restaurateurs themselves. This could be one of the reasons why they choose to display them on outdoor signage. Verification of the validity of this assumption requires, however, interviews with restaurateurs. They will be conducted in the next step of this research. At this point, it can be concluded that sinograms displayed on Chinese restaurant storefronts in Prague primarily function as symbols appealing to

customers' emotions, whether they are or are not proficient in the Chinese language. The difference lies in the level of linguistic analysis that the name-givers expect from different groups of viewers while decoding what they represent. It is polarized between superficial recognition of the Chinese writing system and in-depth comprehension of multilayer cultural concepts.

6. Conclusion

The general orientation of LL study on urban areas with large multilingual populations leads to research topic choices that, apart from English as the current *lingua franca*, tend to overlook the appearance of a foreign language in a predominantly monolingual region. The research presented in this paper highlights the significance of a non-Latin script displayed on the commercial signs in ethnically very homogeneous Czechia. The role of sinograms on Chinese restaurant signs is investigated through a visual analysis that brings together linguistic and graphic perspectives. The paper lists the types of objects on which sinograms are displayed, classifies the kind of message written in sinograms, analyzes the typology and amount of ideas transferred into Czech, and explores the graphic attributes of the displayed sinograms. The results of the analysis provide evidence that marketing Chinese ethnicity through the sinograms manifests a high level of socio-cultural unity. Three main similarities were identified: reiteration of sinograms on multiple signs, typification in the visual appearance, and exclusive content hidden from the local consumers. The first of them demonstrates the significance of sinograms in marketing Chinese ethnicity. The second indicates a tendency to an aesthetic formalization of promoting Chineseness through sinograms. Finally, the third refers to the somewhat paradoxical fact that restaurants invest significant effort in creating semantically appealing word-formation constructions in Chinese, but refrain from uncovering these culture-determined ideas to local clientele.

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