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บรรยากาศต่างวิสัยบนถนนซีเจียในเมืองเฉวียนโจว : ภูมิทัศน์ทางภาษาแบบพหุผัสสะของการกลายเป็นสินค้า การทำสินค้าให้เป็นอัตลักษณ์เชิงพื้นที่ และการปะติดทางวัฒนธรรม

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บทคัดย่อ: การศึกษานี้มีส่วนช่วยต่อความก้าวหน้าล่าสุดในงานวิจัยภูมิทัศน์ทางภาษา โดยมุ่งวิเคราะห์คุณลักษณะทางพหุผัสสะ และลักษณะบรรยากาศต่างวิสัยของถนนซีเจีย ซึ่งเป็นย่านพาณิชย์เก่าแก่ในเมืองเฉวียนโจว ประเทศจีน งานวิจัยนี้ต้องการตรวจสอบว่าทรัพยากรสัญญะทางสายตา การได้ยิน และเชิงพื้นที่ สร้างบรรยากาศทางวัฒนธรรม กำหนดอัตลักษณ์เชิงพื้นที่ และเอื้อต่อกระบวนการทำให้เป็นสินค้าและการประกอบสร้างทางวัฒนธรรมได้อย่างไร ฐานข้อมูลประกอบด้วยภาพถ่ายป้ายภาษาหลายภาษา 98 ภาพ (ภาษาจีนตัวย่อ/จีนตัวเต็ม ภาษาอังกฤษ ภาษาไทย ภาษาอุยกูร์) สถาปัตยกรรมทางศาสนาและเชิงพาณิชย์ กราฟฟิตี และการบันทึกเสียงบรรยากาศ 3 ชุด (การตีเครื่องเงิน การบรรเลงกู่ฉิน ดนตรีถนนของชาวอุยกูร์) ในเชิงระเบียบวิธี งานวิจัยนี้ประยุกต์ใช้การวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมพหุสื่อ การทำชาติพันธุ์วรรณนาเชิงภูมิทัศน์เสียง และสัญญะวิทยาเชิงพื้นที่ ภายใต้กรอบแนวคิดที่บูรณาการเฮเทอโรโทเปีย โครโนโทป การสร้างแบรนด์ทางวัฒนธรรม และลัทธินิยมเมืองเชิงบรรยากาศ ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าถนนเวสต์ทำหน้าที่เป็นพื้นที่สัญญะที่มีชั้นเชิงซ้อน ซึ่งมรดกทางศาสนา สัญลักษณ์วัฒนธรรมย่อย และสุนทรียศาสตร์ทางประสาทสัมผัส ร่วมกันผลิตบรรยากาศที่ถูกทำให้เป็นสินค้าร่วมกับอารมณ์สุนทรียะ การประกอบสร้างบรรยากาศต่างวิสัยเหล่านี้ทำหน้าที่ไกล่เกลี่ยความตึงเครียดระหว่างประเพณีกับการท่องเที่ยว อัตลักษณ์ท้องถิ่นกับจินตนาการระดับโลก งานวิจัยนี้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงคุณค่าของการใช้แนวทางภูมิทัศน์ทางภาษาหลายประสาทสัมผัสในการทำความเข้าใจว่าพื้นที่ถูกจัดฉาก รับรู้ และบริโภคอย่างไรในบริบทเมืองจีนร่วมสมัย

คำสำคัญ: บรรยากาศต่างวิสัย; ภูมิทัศน์ทางภาษาแบบพหุผัสสะ; การทำให้เป็นสินค้า; อัตลักษณ์เชิงพื้นที่; เฉวียนโจว

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Heterotopic Atmospheres on West Street in Quanzhou: A Multisensory Linguistic Landscape of Commodification, Chronotopes, and Cultural Assemblages

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Abstract: This study contributes to recent developments in linguistic landscape research by examining the multisensory and heterotopic features of West Street, a historic commercial area in Quanzhou, China. The research investigates how visual, auditory, and spatial semiotic resources construct cultural atmospheres, shape chronotopic identities, and facilitate processes of commodification and cultural assemblage. The dataset includes 98 images of multilingual signage (Simplified/Traditional Chinese, English, Thai, Uyghur), religious and commercial architecture, graffiti, and 3 ambient sound recordings (silverwork crafting, guqin performance, Uyghur street music). Methodologically, the study combines multimodal discourse analysis, soundscape ethnography, and spatial semiotics, within a framework that integrates heterotopia, chronotopes, cultural branding, and atmospheric urbanism. Findings show that West Street functions as a layered semiotic space, where religious heritage, subcultural symbols, and sensory aesthetics co-produce a commodified and affectively charged atmosphere. These heterotopic assemblages mediate tensions between tradition and tourism, local identity and global imagination. The study highlights the value of a multisensory linguistic landscape approach in understanding how place is staged, experienced, and consumed in contemporary Chinese urban contexts.

Keywords: Heterotopic atmosphere; Multisensory linguistic landscape; Commodification; Chronotope; Quanzhou

泉州西街的异质性氛围：商品化、时空体与文化拼贴的多感官语言景观

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摘要：本研究通过考察中国泉州历史悠久的商业区西街的多感官和异托邦特征，为语言景观研究的最新进展做出了贡献。该研究探讨了视觉、听觉和空间符号资源如何构建文化氛围、塑造时空身份以及促进商品化和文化拼贴的过程。研究数据集包括 98 张多语言标识（简体/繁体中文、英语、泰语、维吾尔语）、宗教和商业建筑、涂鸦的图片以及 3 段环境声音录音（银器制作、古琴演奏、维吾尔族街头音乐）。在方法论上，该研究结合了多模态话语分析、声音景观民族志和空间符号学，其框架整合了异托邦、时空体、文化品牌和氛围城市主义。研究结果表明，西街是一个分层的符号空间，宗教遗产、亚文化符号和感官美学共同营造出一种商品化且充满情感色彩的氛围。这些异位组合调解了传统与旅游、地方认同与全球想象之间的紧张关系。该研究强调了多感官语言景观方法在理解当代中国城市环境中地方是如何被塑造、体验和消费方面的价值。

关键词：异质性氛围；多感官语言景观；商品化；时空体；泉州

Introduction

In recent years, the study of linguistic landscapes has received increasing attention in sociolinguistics, cultural geography, and semiotics (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). Scholars have examined how public signs, multilingual texts, and symbolic artifacts in urban spaces construct meanings, reflect power relations, and shape identities. At the same time, a growing body of research has begun to explore the sensory turn in urban studies and human geography, acknowledging that cities are experienced not only through sight but also through sound, smell, material textures, and embodied rhythms (Pink, 2015; Degen, 2008). These strands of inquiry have laid the foundation for multisensory approaches to linguistic landscapes, which emphasize how language signs co-exist with and are amplified by ambient atmospheres, sounds, architectures, and spatial practices.

Despite the increasing importance of both linguistic landscape studies and sensory urbanism, the integration of multisensory perception with critical concepts such as heterotopia, chronotopes, and commodification remains underexplored. Existing studies tend to treat linguistic data (text, typography, language choice) in visual isolation, while soundscapes and material cultures are often relegated to separate disciplines. As a result, the interplay between multisensory experience and spatial-cultural meaning-making has rarely been theorized as a cohesive whole.

The relation between multisensory semiotics and the production of heterotopic urban atmospheres would seem an important question for research, especially in culturally layered cities like Quanzhou.

Objective

In order to better understand how local identities, temporal imaginaries, and commodified cultures are constructed and negotiated in everyday commercial streetscapes, this paper adopts a multisensory and heterotopic lens to examine the West Street area of Quanzhou, China.

In this paper, I shall discuss three main research questions:

(1) How do language signs, material textures, and ambient sounds on West Street construct multisensory urban atmospheres?

(2) In what ways do these atmospheres activate chronotopic identities that reflect both tradition and globalization?

(3) How does West Street function as a heterotopic space where religious, commercial, ethnic, and artistic discourses are juxtaposed and commodified?

Scope of the study

Using a discursive and rhetorical approach, I explore how signs and sounds function not only as communicative media but also as affective and atmospheric tools. The data analyzed in this study include

98 images of linguistic landscapes (covering Simplified and Traditional Chinese, English, Uyghur, and fake Thai scripts), architectural photography (Christian churches, Kaiyuan Temple, oyster-shell wall shops), and three soundscapes recorded on-site (silversmithing, guqin performance in a teahouse, and Uyghur songs from a street vendor).

These materials are interpreted through the frameworks of multisensory linguistic landscape (Banda & Jimaima, 2015), urban atmospheres (Anderson, 2009), chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981), heterotopia (Foucault, 1986), and cultural commodification (Heller, 2010).

In this way, we seek to respond to the recent call for rethinking linguistic landscapes as more-than-visual phenomena (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2010; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). This article also contributes to the study of cultural assemblages by illustrating how linguistic signs, atmospheric affects, and spatial politics interweave in contemporary Chinese urban spaces undergoing heritage tourism and commercial reinvention.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 1 reviews key literature on linguistic landscapes, urban sensory studies, and heterotopic theory. Section 2 outlines the methodology, including data collection and analytical procedures. Section 3 presents a layered analysis of West Street's multisensory features and symbolic tensions. Section 4 discusses the theoretical and sociolinguistic implications of heterotopic atmospheres in commodified cultural spaces. The conclusion reflects on the significance of sensory approaches to understanding language, identity, and power in urban China.

Literature review

1. Linguistic Landscape Studies and the Multisensory Turn

Since its conceptual emergence in the late 1990s, linguistic landscape (LL) research has garnered increasing scholarly attention as a way to explore how written language, displayed in public spaces, indexes social identities, power relations, and language ideologies. Landry and Bourhis (1997) were among the first to define the linguistic landscape as "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region," laying the groundwork for a field that has since diversified in both methodology and scope.

Early LL studies primarily focused on the visual representation of written language, examining multilingual signage to understand issues such as language policy, minority language presence, and sociolinguistic hierarchies (Backhaus, 2007; Gorter, 2006). These approaches tended to privilege textual analysis and symbolic interpretation, treating signs as relatively static reflections of sociolinguistic structures.

However, scholars have increasingly recognized that urban semiotic environments are not limited to visual-linguistic signs but are instead embedded within multimodal and multisensory landscapes. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) called for a broader approach to LL that includes semiotic resources such as

images, colours, spatial arrangements, and even embodied practices, thus marking a methodological shift toward multimodality.

This movement has since evolved into what Banda and Jimaima (2015) describe as a "sociolinguistics of mobility," where landscapes are seen as dynamic spaces of interaction shaped by migration, commerce, and cultural flows. Their study of multilingual signage in Zambian urban markets emphasized not only the multilingual text but also the materiality of signs, the rhythm of street sounds, and the bodily practices of navigating space, suggesting a need for more sensorially attuned frameworks.

Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) further extend this trajectory through their work on metrolingualism and semiotic assemblages. They argue that language in the city is best understood through its interconnection with material, sensory, and affective dimensions, where the "taste of noodles," the "sound of sizzling meat," and the "feel of shopfront surfaces" are as much part of the linguistic landscape as printed words. In this sense, soundscapes, textures, and even smells are integral to understanding how linguistic meaning is produced and experienced in space.

As a result, the field has moved from an early emphasis on written text in static form to a recognition of the embodied, performative, and sensorial qualities of public signage. The multisensory turn in LL studies thus enables a more nuanced engagement with how language, space, and the senses interact in the shaping of urban cultural life. This is particularly relevant for the case of West Street, where signage, sounds, materials, and spatial layout together co-construct an atmospheric, commodified, and culturally hybrid environment.

2. Urban Atmospheres and Affective Semiotics

In recent years, the concept of urban atmosphere has gained increasing prominence in the interdisciplinary fields of cultural geography, anthropology, urban studies, and semiotics. This shift reflects a broader concern with how affective, sensory, and semiotic practices shape everyday experiences of urban life. Rather than being reducible to individual feelings or private emotions, atmosphere is increasingly understood as a socially and materially constituted field of perception (Anderson, 2009).

Böhme (1993) was among the first scholars to articulate a philosophy of atmosphere, defining it as a "tuned space" (gestimmter Raum) that arises through the interaction between material arrangements and human perception. According to Böhme, atmospheres are neither purely subjective nor entirely objective but emerge in the in-between space of embodied experience and spatial configuration. His later work (Böhme, 2013) extended this concept to urban environments, showing how architectural features, materials, and even smells and sounds contribute to the "affective tonality" of a place.

Building on these philosophical foundations, Anderson (2009) argues that atmospheres are "enveloping presences" — collective and diffuse fields that shape how space is felt and navigated. Importantly, he suggests that atmospheres are not static but generated through movement, repetition,

and interaction, often mediated by semiotic forms such as signage, lighting, or sound. This insight is particularly salient in linguistic landscape studies, where public texts, sonic environments, and material surfaces together construct affective experiences of locality.

In the field of urban cultural studies, Edensor (2012) provides a detailed ethnographic account of how urban atmospheres are staged and performed, often shaped by infrastructural rhythms, spatial textures, and everyday routines. He argues that cities generate atmospheres not only through their physical layout but also via affective intensities—for example, the contrast between the tranquil solemnity of a temple courtyard and the noisy conviviality of a street food alley.

More recently, Pink (2015) integrates these ideas into her sensory ethnographic approach, emphasizing the importance of multisensory methods in studying atmospheres. She suggests that visual, auditory, haptic, and olfactory dimensions of urban space all contribute to the production of meaning and affect. Importantly, Pink advocates for an "emplaced" perspective that understands atmosphere as a relational product of bodies moving through culturally coded environments.

This paper demonstrates that urban atmosphere is a collective, sensorial, and semiotic construction. It is through the interaction of language signs, architectural materials, ambient sounds, and spatial organization that particular emotional tones or "affective regimes" are generated. This perspective provides a valuable lens through which to analyze West Street, where traditional temples, commercial signage, ethnic sounds, and hybrid materials interact to form atmospheres that are simultaneously nostalgic, commodified, and culturally contested.

3. Chronotopes, Time-Space, and Identity

The concept of the chronotope—literally meaning "time-space"—originates from the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), who proposed it to understand how temporal and spatial relationships are configured in narrative. Bakhtin argued that chronotopes are not neutral containers of action but actively shape the meaning of events, characters, and identities by embedding them within culturally resonant time-space frameworks. While initially developed in the context of literary analysis, the chronotope has been productively extended to sociolinguistic and cultural studies to examine how identities and ideologies are mediated through spatial and temporal imaginaries.

In linguistic landscape research, Blommaert (2018) emphasizes the relevance of chronotopes for understanding how signs in public space index layered temporalities and spatialities. According to him, a single sign may "carry" multiple chronotopes, evoking traditional authenticity while simultaneously projecting a cosmopolitan or globalized identity. This is particularly visible in urban contexts where modernity and tradition are juxtaposed, such as a contemporary bar using vintage-style typography or a heritage building repurposed as a tourist café. Blommaert points out that such configurations are not random but ideologically loaded: they signal who belongs, who remembers, and who is being addressed.

This layered temporality is closely linked to the notion of chronotopic identity, which refers to how individuals and communities articulate their identities through the intersection of spatial emplacement and temporal imagination. Leander (2021), in her work on semiotic landscapes and literacy practices, argues that chronotopic identity is formed not merely by being "in" a place but through the ways people relate to a place across time—through memory, anticipation, and historical narration. Her study of graffiti and public inscriptions shows how signs function as time stamps of socio-political experience, connecting the now with the then, the local with the global.

In spaces like Quanzhou's West Street, the chronotope provides a critical lens for understanding the coexistence of Buddhist temples, colonial churches, faux-Thai signage, and youth graffiti. These spatial elements do not just cohabit but produce a montage of temporalities—invoking ancient religiosity, modern tourism, and subcultural resistance within the same physical corridor. This heterogeneity, rather than being incoherent, is central to how West Street performs its identity: not as a stable essence, but as a patchwork of temporal-spatial affiliations that reflect broader negotiations of heritage, commodification, and belonging.

Thus, the chronotope is not only a descriptive tool but an analytic one that helps map how space and time co-produce affective, political, and cultural meanings. It foregrounds the temporality of the linguistic landscape, allowing researchers to see public signage not as isolated messages but as nodes in a socio-historical dialogue.

4. Heterotopia and Spatial Politics

The concept of heterotopia, first articulated by Michel Foucault in his 1986 lecture "Of Other Spaces", offers a compelling framework for analyzing urban spaces that defy conventional spatial categorization. Foucault defines heterotopias as "real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites", simultaneously reflecting and inverting the spaces they coexist with. Heterotopias are typically characterized by multiple layers of meaning, symbolic tension, and spatial heterogeneity, often serving as zones of transgression, marginality, or cultural hybridity (Foucault, 1986).

In urban and sociolinguistic studies, heterotopia has become a useful analytical tool for interrogating how power, identity, and spatial ordering intersect in the built environment. Hetherington (1997) develops Foucault's ideas by showing how heterotopic spaces, such as museums, carnivals, or squats, function as "spaces of alternate ordering", challenging dominant regimes of visibility, value, and control. These sites do not merely exist outside the norm, but often reveal the structuring logics of the norm itself. His analysis emphasizes that heterotopias are ambivalent: while they may host resistance and creativity, they are also subject to regulation and commodification.

In the field of linguistic landscape studies, Cenzatti (2008) applies the concept of heterotopia to the semiotics of urban borders and multicultural neighborhoods, showing how signs, languages, and spatial arrangements in immigrant districts construct places that are simultaneously included and excluded, familiar and foreign. These zones disrupt monolingual and monocultural assumptions about the city, offering multivocal, layered spaces where alternative narratives can be expressed, particularly through signage, architecture, and street-level performances.

West Street in Quanzhou exemplifies such a heterotopic configuration. It juxtaposes Buddhist temples with Christian churches, traditional silver artisans with contemporary subcultural graffiti, and authentic religious signage with commodified "fake Thai" menus. This spatial collision of sacred and profane, traditional and touristic, global and local produces a site of aesthetic and ideological ambiguity. It is in such spaces that cultural assemblages, marginal expressions, and contested identities find room for articulation.

Moreover, heterotopia is not only descriptive but political. By foregrounding the conflicted layering and boundary-crossing within urban space, it allows us to interrogate how certain languages, practices, or populations are spatially encoded as visible or invisible, legitimate or illegitimate. In the case of West Street, heterotopia becomes a lens through which to analyze the micro-politics of cultural commodification, affective navigation, and semiotic inclusion/exclusion.

5. Cultural Commodification and Assemblage Thinking

The study of cultural commodification focuses on how cultural forms, practices, and identities are detached from their original contexts and repackaged for commercial consumption, especially in the contexts of tourism, heritage branding, and global capitalism. As Heller (2010) argues, language and culture are increasingly mobilized as symbolic resources in the global economy, often commodified to index authenticity, exoticism, or tradition. In multilingual and multicultural spaces like Quanzhou's West Street, this commodification becomes evident in the visual appropriation of foreign scripts, architectural motifs, and soundscapes for aesthetic consumption, rather than communicative or ritual purposes.

Pennycook (2007) extends this discussion by exploring how language itself becomes a product, particularly in global cities and tourist hubs. He notes that scripts such as Japanese kanji or faux Thai are frequently deployed not for linguistic accuracy but for their semiotic affordances—their ability to visually signify an exotic "Other." This transformation of language into visual branding alters the role of signage from mere information to affective and cultural performance. Linguistic landscapes, in this light, are not just texts to be read but images to be consumed, embedded in broader circuits of global cultural flows.

The theoretical lens of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) offers a productive way to theorize the non-cohesive, fragmented, and contingent nature of such cultural spaces. Assemblage thinking moves away from notions of cultural coherence and instead embraces heterogeneity, multiplicity, and instability.

Urban semiotic spaces are thus seen not as unified wholes but as collages of materials, languages, identities, and affects that are temporarily assembled and constantly shifting. In West Street, the juxtaposition of religious iconography, fake multilingual signage, local crafts, and subcultural graffiti illustrates how cultural meaning emerges not from integration but from aggregation.

Building on this, Lash and Lury (2007) describe global culture as a system of "global flows and cultural circuits," where commodities are less about utility and more about affective and symbolic intensity. Their work suggests that assemblages are not random but are shaped by power, media, and market forces, which determine which elements become visible, valuable, or "authentic." This view is especially relevant to touristified landscapes where culture is curated and staged, not merely preserved.

Together, these frameworks highlight how linguistic landscapes serve as interfaces of commodified culture and how assemblage allows us to trace the connections between language, space, capital, and identity without reducing them to essentialist categories. In West Street's case, the eclectic mix of scripts, architectural surfaces, and sensory cues forms a semiotic and affective terrain through which culture is both displayed and sold.

Methodology

This section introduces the analytical methods and explains the data collection process. This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the multisensory linguistic landscape (LL) of West Street in Quanzhou, China, with particular attention to how commodified cultural assemblages, heterotopic spatialities, and chronotopic identities are constructed and perceived. Rooted in the tradition of LL research (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009), the methodology expands beyond the visual paradigm by incorporating sound, materiality, and spatial affect, in line with recent multisensory and semiotic developments in the field (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009).

Fieldwork was conducted over a six-week period in early 2025, during which a corpus of 98 photographic images and 3 audio recordings was compiled. The images were captured using a high-resolution digital camera and include a range of signage types—storefront signs, interior decorations, religious and vernacular architectural markers, and graffiti—featuring Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English, Uyghur, and pseudo-Thai scripts. The three audio segments were recorded to represent key sound events: the metallic clang of silver jewelry crafting, the delicate strings of a guqin performance in a teahouse, and a Uyghur street vendor playing regional music.

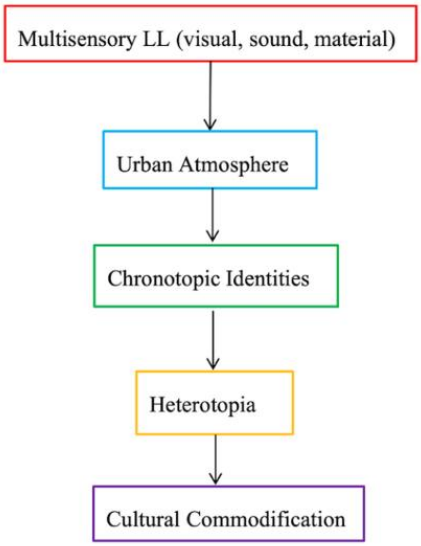
In addition to visual and auditory data, extensive fieldnotes were taken on-site to document olfactory impressions (e.g., incense near temples, grilled lamb skewers in street markets), tactile elements (e.g., shell-encrusted walls, wood-carved signboards), and the overall affective atmospheres of distinct spatial zones. These were recorded systematically and geo-tagged to support spatial-temporal analysis in table 1.

Table 1 Data collection

Data Type	Quantity	Examples and descriptions
Photographic Images	98	Storefronts, graffiti, religious architecture, pseudo-Thai signage
Audio Recordings	3	Silver crafting, guqin performance, Uyghur street music
Fieldnotes & Observations	36 entries	Smell (incense, barbecue), touch (shell/wood textures), ambient lighting and layout

The analysis was guided by a theory-informed coding scheme, designed to operationalize five core conceptual categories: (1) multisensory semiotics, (2) urban atmospheres, (3) chronotopic identity, (4) heterotopia, and (5) cultural commodification and assemblage. These categories emerged from a synthesis of theoretical literature across sociolinguistics, cultural geography, and critical theory (Böhme, 1993; Anderson, 2009; Bakhtin, 1981; Foucault, 1986; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Data were imported into NVivo 14 for qualitative analysis. The coding process combined inductive and deductive strategies: initial open coding allowed for emergent themes (e.g., “material authenticity,” “script parody,” “ritual-commercial juxtaposition”), while axial coding mapped these themes onto the predefined theoretical framework (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Theoretical framework



Multimodal transcription of the soundscapes was conducted following the guidelines proposed by Van Leeuwen (1999), including parameters such as timbre, rhythm, and spatial diffusion. Photographs were analyzed not only for linguistic content but also for their materiality (e.g., hand-painted vs. printed), spatial

layering (foreground vs. background text), and embedded symbolic systems (e.g., Buddhist, Islamic, or global pop culture references).

In keeping with standards of methodological rigor in ethnographic research (Pink, 2015), triangulation was achieved by cross-validating data types (images, audio, fieldnotes), revisiting field sites across different times of day, and maintaining a reflexive field journal to account for the researcher's sensory and affective positioning (Rose, 2007). All data were collected in publicly accessible spaces with no identifiable personal data involved, adhering to the ethical protocols.

While the study does not aim for generalizability, its strength lies in its depth and contextual specificity. The integration of multisensory and heterotopic approaches to linguistic landscape analysis contributes to an evolving body of literature that seeks to understand how commodified spaces encode, evoke, and circulate cultural meaning through more-than-visual semiotic practices.

Research Results

1. The Material and Multisensory Stratification of West Street

West Street in Quanzhou presents a densely layered semiotic and sensory experience where linguistic signs, material textures, and ambient sounds interact to produce an immersive sense of place. Moving beyond the conventional visual-centric approaches in linguistic landscape (LL) studies (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009), this study takes a multisensory approach, incorporating visual heterogeneity, tactile materiality, and auditory environments as co-constructors of urban atmosphere.

The linguistic signage on West Street exhibits an eclectic visual ensemble. The presence of Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English, faux Thai script, and Uyghur Arabic-based script on commercial signs reflects a stylistic patchwork that does not simply index multilingualism but performs a commodified exoticism. For instance, several storefronts advertising Thai-style barbecue feature stylized scripts mimicking Thai orthography, though the text is linguistically nonsensical—thus constituting what Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) term a "semiotic resource" rather than a communicative code. In another case, Uyghur script is deployed not for authentic linguistic communication but as a visual texture to denote cultural otherness.

These visual signs are embedded within material environments rich with tactile and spatial affordances. Storefronts constructed from oyster shells, hand-carved wooden beams, and faux-handwritten calligraphy boards simulate a handcrafted aesthetic associated with tradition and locality. As Figure 2 shows, a tea shop facade constructed with oyster shells and inscribed with brush-style slogans evokes a nostalgic aura that is both material and visual, conjuring a "heritage atmosphere" (Böhme, 1993). The material stratification of these spaces—brick and shell juxtaposed with neon plastic and LED lights—discloses tensions between the organic and the commodified.

Figure 2 Materiality-focused façade images (shell wall, carved wood, handwritten calligraphy)

Furthermore, the auditory dimension reinforces these semiotic textures. The clinking of metal tools from a silver jewelry stall blends with the faint sound of a guqin (Chinese zither) played in a nearby tea house. This layered sonic atmosphere contrasts with the more chaotic back alleys, where Uyghur pop music and street food vendors create a rhythmic, hybridized urban beat. These soundscapes, as explored in recent multisensory LL scholarship (Banda & Jimaima, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2017), not only supplement the visual field but also mark affective transitions across micro-spaces. In Figue 3, we present a waveform comparison between the ambient sound of the guqin teahouse and the rhythmic noise of the barbecue stall, illustrating a sonic stratification that echoes the visual and material contrast.

Figure 3 Cross-sensory atmosphere zones (audio)

What emerges from this multisensory layering is a complex sensory cartography where languages function as surfaces, rather than fixed communicative codes. The interplay of materiality, textuality, and ambient sound constructs West Street as an experiential heteroglossia—a space where commercial intent and cultural memory interweave through embodied sensation. Such spatial-semantic layering is crucial for understanding how "atmospheres of place" are performed through overlapping modalities.

2. Divergent Atmospheres: From Tranquility to Chaos

Contrary to the homogenizing tourist imagination of West Street as a unified cultural site, ethnographic observation reveals an affective divergence that cuts across its spatial and sensorial topography.

In the eastern segment of West Street, adjacent to Kaiyuan Temple, the dominant atmosphere is one of tranquility and reverence. The semiotic landscape here includes calligraphic signage with words such as "茶桌仔" (chazhuozai) and "愛" (love), often inscribed on wooden plaques or carved stone (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Tranquility of tea house

Auditory elements include soft footsteps on cobblestone, intermittent guqin music from a nearby tea house, and murmured conversation. Visual and acoustic calm are reinforced by narrow alleys, traditional brick walls, and shaded foliage.

"When I sit in my tea shop and play the guqin, the only thing I hear is the wind and the strings," said Mr. Lin, a guqin performer and tea shop owner. "Many visitors stop walking just to listen. This part of West Street invites silence." (interview 1)

Figure 5 Guqin music from teahouse (audio)

The western segment, by contrast, transitions into a zone of auditory saturation and visual excess. This district, characterized by its night market, street food vendors, and bars, generates what Edensor (2012) calls affective intensity fields: overwhelming sensory environments that provoke affective engagement. Here, signs in bold fonts and vibrant colors proclaim "完美酒舍(Dream House)" Uyghur pop songs, shouted promotions, and clinking beer bottles coalesce into a sonic tapestry of commercial vitality (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Chaos of pub

"We chose blue and golden lights and louder music on purpose," explained Ms. Yang, a manager of a Thai-themed bar. "It helps people feel more alive—and it makes the street feel like a festival." (interview 2) In contrast, Ms. Liu, a 65-year-old local resident, expressed discomfort: *"I avoid that end of the street. It used to be quiet all the way, but now it's too noisy. I come here to walk and feel peace, not to party." (interview 3)*

The divergence in atmosphere is also materially and spatially encoded. This bifurcation of urban atmospheres supports Pink's (2015) argument that atmospheres are not background conditions but affective infrastructures that shape how people move, feel, and behave in space. In the tranquil zone, people slow down, whisper, and take photographs of heritage sites. In the commercial zone, they talk loudly, eat on the go, and shift attention rapidly between shops and sounds.

Ultimately, the divergent atmospheres of West Street are not incidental. They are meticulously engineered through the multisensory linguistic landscape: language, sound, texture, light, and signage operate together to produce localized forms of cultural intensity. These atmospheres frame how visitors interpret space, how locals claim authenticity, and how commerce and heritage negotiate their uneasy coexistence.

3. Temporal Layering and Chronotopic Identities

The linguistic landscape of West Street does not merely reflect spatial diversity—it is a temporal palimpsest, where fragments of cultural history, religious discourse, and global consumerism are layered across both visual and sonic terrains. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the chronotope, this section examines how time and space intersect to construct contested identities and overlapping cultural rhythms. A chronotope, as applied here, is not just a spatiotemporal container but a semiotic mechanism that fuses temporal memory with spatial inscriptions.

West Street's temporal stratification is made most visible through the juxtaposition of traditional religious and artisanal languages with contemporary globalized and hybrid forms. For instance, storefronts surrounding Kaiyuan Temple prominently feature calligraphic signage (Figure 6) in classical Chinese, with lexical fields centered on terms like "香道" (the Way of Incense), "银匠" (silversmith), or "佛缘" (Buddhist fate). These signs are often engraved on wooden plaques or cast in stone, creating what Blommaert (2018) refers to as indexical layering, where language becomes an emblem of temporal depth and local authenticity.

Figure 7 Silversmith and Buddhist fate on sign

By contrast, moving westward along the street reveals a stark visual shift. Hand-painted graffiti in English or hybridized scripts (Figure 8)—such as mock Thai-English labels like "泰式奶茶 ชาไข่มุกไทย 老挝冰咖啡 กาแฟเย็นลาว"—begin to dominate the landscape. These signs do not correspond to actual Thai or English orthographic norms; rather, they simulate foreignness, embodying what Leander (2021) calls chronotopic dissonance: a deliberate distortion of time-place logic to evoke a sense of playful, consumer-friendly exoticism. These signs signal not linguistic function, but aestheticized globalization, as commodified time-spaces displaced from authentic historical or cultural referents.

Figure 8 Thai scripts on sign

A similar chronotopic collision is registered in the soundscape. In the eastern section near the temple, visitors encounter the delicate plucking of the guqin, an instrument historically associated with scholarly self-cultivation. The music's slow tempo and tonal restraint anchor the listener in a Confucian-

Buddhist ethos of timeless reflection. Audio spectrograms of guqin recordings collected on-site show clear frequency separation and minimal volume flux—signifiers of meditative acoustic space.

In contrast, recordings from the street's nightlife section reveal rapid-tempo rock and Uyghur pop music, often blasted through portable speakers by vendors or bars. The layered noise—clashing conversations, sizzling skewers, and background music—forms a compressed acoustic space that disorients and accelerates. This sonic environment is not merely "presentist" but invokes what DeNora (2000) terms musical time engineering: the use of music to manipulate affective temporal flow, inducing urgency and excitement *aligned with fast consumption.*

"I come here to learn about old Quanzhou. I love watching the silversmith work—he has been here for thirty years. " (Interview 4, Mr. Chen, a retired local teacher)

In contrast, a young tourist from Shanghai commented: *"I liked the fake Thai bar. It is cool, funny, and looks good in photos —even if the Thai is not real. " (Interview 5)*

These responses exemplify what Bakhtin termed the polyphony of identity—West Street becomes a dialogic arena where multiple chronotopes compete for legitimacy, marketability, and emotional resonance. The same space hosts not only competing languages but competing temporal claims—some rooted in lineage, others manufactured for Instagram.

Thus, chronotopic identity on West Street is neither stable nor singular. It is assemblaged, layered through signs, sounds, and built environments, creating affective registers that speak simultaneously to nostalgia, irony, and anticipation. The temporal politics of the street lie not in a clear rupture between old and new, but in the fusion and friction between them.

4. Heterotopic Juxtapositions: Negotiating Sacred, Profane, and Commercial Spaces

A striking example can be observed in the middle section of West Street, where a historical Christian church is located just meters away from a graffiti-covered alley (Figure 9). The church, marked by Gothic architectural features and calm religious iconography, directly abuts a wall saturated with layers of spray-painted English tags, cartoonish characters, and political slogans. This spatial adjacency of sacred and profane—a place of worship and a site of youthful rebellion—creates a visual tension that unsettles traditional semiotic boundaries between "pure" and "polluted" spaces (Cenzatti, 2008).

Figure 9 Juxtaposition of a Gothic Christian Church and a Graffiti-Covered Wall on West Street

Equally symbolic is the presence of a Buddhist temple gate located within walking distance from a smoky street barbecue stand branded as "Xinjiang Street Fire" (Figure 10). The barbecue vendor plays loud pop music, its lyrics barely discernible but rhythmically infectious. Tourists queue beside statues of Bodhisattvas, and the air is filled simultaneously with the smell of incense and grilled meat. These overlapping sensoria point to a heterotopia of simultaneity, where distinct affective registers—spiritual awe and gustatory pleasure—coexist without resolution.

Figure 10 Overlapping Scenes of Buddhist Temple Gate and Street Barbecue Vendor Playing Pop Music

Ethnographic interviews with both residents and tourists further highlight how these spatial and semiotic entanglements are received. A 28-year-old local café owner commented:

"I pass by the church every morning. The graffiti next to it? It used to annoy me. But now I think it tells a story—this is not just a religious place anymore, it's part of the city's youth energy too." (Interview 5).

In contrast, a middle-aged visitor from Shanghai expressed discomfort: *"It feels disrespectful. The holy and the commercial should be separated. It's chaotic." (Interview 6)*

Interestingly, some young tourists embrace the spatial mixture as a sign of cultural openness. A university student from Guangzhou said:

"I like it. Where else can you pray and then get drunk within ten minutes? It's real. It's alive." (interview 7)

These narratives point to West Street's heterotopic quality not merely as visual collage, but as a lived experience of overlapping norms and contested meanings. Heterotopia here does not dilute identities—it multiplies them, offering a stage where the sacred, the profane, and the commodified coexist and are constantly renegotiated.

5. Cultural Commodification and the Assemblage of Affective Surfaces

West Street's commercial landscape is saturated with aesthetic fragments—scripts, sounds, textures, and symbols—that do not originate from coherent cultural systems but are instead deployed as commodified "surfaces" meant to evoke exoticism, authenticity, or tradition. This process of cultural commodification operates through what Lash and Lury (2007) call affective economies, where cultural signs are disembodied from their origins and repurposed as modular elements in a consumer-driven assemblage.

One notable example is the frequent appropriation of Buddhist or Sanskrit-style fonts on restaurant menus and storefronts that have no religious affiliation. In a vegetarian fusion café near the temple entrance, the English word "Peace" is stylized with faux-Indic calligraphy, surrounded by lotus motifs and incense. While the staff confirms no religious training or Buddhist symbolism is practiced, the décor is "designed to make people feel spiritual and clean." The material design becomes a surface affect—a deliberate semiotic cue to evoke calmness and ethical consumption, without anchoring to actual religious knowledge or cultural practice.

Linguistic heteroglossia also marks the façade of many businesses. Across multiple Thai-themed restaurants, a recurring pattern appears: Latin alphabet words like "Tom Yum Kung," stylized pseudo-Thai scripts, and standard Mandarin slogans are mixed within the same visual field. This aesthetic layering constructs a visual collage detached from linguistic functionality but rich in affective suggestion. As one shop owner admitted during an interview 8:

"We don't really know Thai. The fonts come from a designer who said they look 'authentic and cool'. Customers don't need to read them. They just need to feel they're somewhere different."

This statement directly reflects Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of assemblage—a non-organic, non-totalizing structure in which heterogeneous elements are drawn together not to form coherence but to produce a particular mood, surface effect, or experience.

Ethnographic interviews and consumer surveys further illuminate how these surfaces are interpreted. A young tourist from Beijing remarked:

"I know the Thai here is fake. But that's not the point—it's fun. It feels like traveling without leaving China." (Interview 9)

In contrast, a Thai-Chinese visitor expressed discomfort:

"It's weird to see my culture like this. The words are wrong, and the decorations are... too much. It doesn't feel respectful." (Interview 10)

Despite these divergent reactions, the commodified linguistic landscape succeeds in crafting what Pennycook (2007) describes as "semiotic mobility"—signs and styles dislodged from origin but recharged as affective tokens in a consumer context.

The consumption of these cultural surfaces is not passive. It participates in the production of imagined elsewheres, where the customer buys not only food or souvenirs but a curated aesthetic experience. The layering of mismatched fonts, decorative scripts, background music, and scented interiors constitute an assemblage in which affect and capital are deeply intertwined.

Conclusion

This article has examined the linguistic and multisensory landscape of West Street in Quanzhou through the intersecting frameworks of multimodal discourse, affective semiotics, chronotopic identity, and assemblage theory. Moving beyond the conventional view of linguistic landscape as a visual inventory of written signs, we have demonstrated how spatial, material, and sonic elements co-produce atmospheres that are deeply affective, culturally layered, and politically charged.

Our findings show that the semiotic fabric of West Street is not merely a matter of text, but a dynamic multisensory infrastructure: fake Thai scripts, religious motifs, metallic hammering, and guqin performances are all enmeshed in the production of local atmospheres. These signs and sounds do not operate in isolation; they function relationally negotiating between tradition and modernity, sacred and commercial, global and local. Through this sensory layering, West Street becomes an emotionally charged space where visitors do not just interpret meaning but feel place.

By analyzing the temporal juxtapositions and affective textures embedded in the urban landscape, we have argued that identity here is not a fixed cultural essence but a chronotopic and heterotopic negotiation—manifested in the friction between Buddhist temples and bars, calligraphy and neon lights, ancient crafts and Instagram aesthetics. The concept of assemblage has allowed us to conceptualize this space as a disjunctive yet productive formation, where fragmented signs and surfaces coalesce into consumable experiences.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the expanding field of multisensory linguistic landscape studies, advocating for a more ethnographically grounded and affectively attuned approach. The integration of audio recordings, visual documentation, and participant interviews offers a richer understanding of how signs do not only communicate language, but mobilize atmosphere, emotion, and memory.

Ultimately, this research responds to recent calls in sociolinguistics and cultural geography to move beyond static readings of urban textscapes and instead engage with the embodied, material, and emotional dimensions of semiotic life (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Edensor, 2012). In doing so, we not only illuminate the socio-semiotic complexity of a culturally hybrid street in southern China, but also provide a transferable framework for analyzing how linguistic landscapes feel, not just what they say.

Discussion

1. From Landscape to Atmosphere: Reframing the Sensory Politics of Space

Traditional studies of linguistic landscapes (LL) have largely been concerned with the visual enumeration of written signs, often focusing on issues of language policy, multilingualism, or symbolic representation (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Backhaus, 2007). However, the present study argues for a paradigmatic shift from viewing LL as static textual surfaces to understanding them as dynamic, multisensory atmospheres—spaces where sound, materiality, and spatiality coalesce with language to construct collectively felt, socially situated environments.

This reframing draws on the "sensory turn" in both linguistic landscape research (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Shohamy & Waksman, 2009) and urban studies (Böhme, 1993; Anderson, 2009), which emphasizes how affective and sensory cues participate in the shaping of experience. In the case of West Street, signs written in Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English, pseudo-Thai, and Uyghur script do not merely "represent" languages—they function as sensory markers that produce distinct textures of cultural atmosphere. The fake Thai fonts used in shop names, for example, work not as communicative tools but as visual ornaments signaling exoticism, triggering affective responses ranging from curiosity to irony.

In parallel, material and acoustic elements—such as oyster shell façades, wooden signage, the sound of silver being hammered, or guqin melodies drifting from a tea house—are not "background" phenomena but active contributors to the semiotic ecology. These elements index craft, tradition, and place-specific sensibilities that appeal to multiple senses simultaneously, thereby constructing an immersive "ambient semiotics" (Edensor, 2012). As Edensor notes, atmospheres are "diffuse, mobile, and collectively felt," and emerge through the confluence of environmental affordances, cultural memory, and embodied perception.

Furthermore, the spatial distribution of these sensory signs reveals that urban atmospheres are structured by sociocultural codes, not random affective states. The tranquil front section of West Street, with its religious buildings and handmade signage, contrasts starkly with the chaotic rear section filled with bars, bright lighting, and hybrid signage. This sensory polarity is not merely aesthetic—it reflects a socio-

spatial ordering of values, practices, and identities, what Anderson (2009) calls "affective atmospheres" that encode ideological orientations into space.

Thus, rather than treating linguistic landscapes as isolated texts, this study conceptualizes them as part of a broader politics of sensing and feeling. The shift from textual analysis to atmospheric analysis reveals how space is shaped not just through meaning, but through mood, texture, rhythm, and intensity. In this sense, multisensory landscapes are affective infrastructures, where language, sound, material, and spatial design intersect to produce specific modalities of dwelling, memory, and belonging.

2. Chronotopic Frictions and Cultural Disjuncture

Building upon the multisensory reframing of space, this section explores how chronotopic frictions—that is, the tensions between coexisting temporalities—are inscribed into the linguistic and material landscape of West Street. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the chronotope, which links time and space as a unified structure of meaning, recent scholarship has extended this idea to urban and linguistic spaces (Blommaert, 2018; Leander, 2021), where older cultural memories collide with commodified modernities, producing layered and sometimes contradictory spatial narratives.

In the West Street data, the juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary semiotics creates a temporal palimpsest. Wooden signs engraved with terms like "香道" (way of incense) or "银匠" (silversmith), rendered in calligraphic style or carved into stone, index a pre-modern temporality anchored in artisanal craft, spiritual calm, and cultural continuity. These signs often appear near temples, heritage buildings, or guqin teahouses, where the ambient soundscape (e.g., slow instrumental music, bird song) reinforces a slowed, contemplative temporality. By contrast, bar façades and pseudo-Thai restaurants further down the street exhibit a simulacral modernity, blending fluorescent lights, English phrases like "Happy Hour" or "Thai BBQ," and fake Thai scripts. These signs operate in a different temporal mode—fast, synthetic, ephemeral, and globally circulating.

This chronotopic layering is not only aesthetic but also socio-political. As Blommaert (2018) argues, language in space becomes a tool for organizing temporal authority and identity. In West Street, the "authentic past" is not erased but rather recontextualized as a marketable trope, while present-day commercial expressions overwrite and remix it. The result is a hybrid chronotope, where cultural disjunctures become part of the spatial experience itself—visitors walk through a street that is both sacred and profane, ancient and contemporary, tranquil and chaotic.

Ethnographic interviews reveal that this layering is deeply felt. An older resident remarked, "我小时候这里只有香火，现在都是烧烤味。" ("When I was young, this place smelled only of incense. Now it's all barbecue smoke.") A Thai Chinese tourist expressed amusement but also confusion: "我看得懂中文，但那个泰文根本不是真的，看起来像是做给外国人看的。" ("I can read the Chinese, but that Thai isn't real—it looks like it's made for tourists.") These reactions point to a chronotopic misalignment, where different communities decode the spatial signs according to divergent temporal and cultural frameworks.

Thus, the spatial assemblage of West Street reflects not merely a multilingual or multimodal landscape, but a temporal politics of identity. In this space, time is not linear or coherent, but folded, patched, and recycled into symbolic layers. This condition complicates traditional notions of authenticity, heritage, and belonging—making the linguistic landscape not only a visual artifact but a living map of temporally stratified identity negotiations.

3. Assemblage and the Emotional Economy of the Street

Having explored the sensory politics and chronotopic layering of West Street, we now turn to the conceptual lens of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to account for the fragmented, affectively charged nature of its linguistic and material space. In contrast to viewing the urban landscape as a unified cultural text, the assemblage approach foregrounds heterogeneity, contingency, and relationality. West Street, in this view, emerges as an affective formation: not a stable semiotic field but a dynamic mixture of signs, surfaces, sounds, and sensibilities—continually reorganized by tourist flows, economic imperatives, and aesthetic trends.

The language on signs provides clear evidence of this cultural recombination. Menus adorned with faux Thai scripts, bar signs combining English catchphrases and stylized Chinese calligraphy, and boutique fronts that decorate their logos with Buddhist-inspired fonts—these all participate in a logic of affective commodification (Heller, 2010; Pennycook, 2007). Here, cultural identity becomes a marketable surface, detached from historical or geographic origin and re-assembled for consumption. As Lash and Lury (2007) argue, in the global economy, "objects are not discrete items but 'thing-events'—bundles of sensation, mobility, and capital." On West Street, signs function similarly: they are not just communicative tools but emotive interfaces, designed to attract, entertain, and seduce.

Ethnographic accounts support this reading. One shop owner explained, "用泰文不是为了泰国人，是为了让游客觉得有异国情调。" ("We use Thai not for Thai customers, but to give tourists a sense of exoticism.") Another mentioned that they purchased their signage from a Taobao designer with no Thai language knowledge, choosing the most "visually attractive" option. A young tourist interviewed at a themed bar said, "我不知道这是什么字体，但拍照很好看。" ("I don't know what this script is, but it looks great in photos.") These comments demonstrate the emotional economy of the street: cultural semiotics are valued not for authenticity or linguistic meaning, but for their affective performance—how they look, sound, and feel within an Instagrammable moment.

Importantly, assemblage thinking allows us to interpret these practices without assuming internal coherence. West Street is not a smoothly branded space, but a disjunctive mosaic where conflicting temporalities, styles, and cultural references cohabit uneasily. This friction is not a flaw but a feature of post-tourist aesthetics—where ambiguity, hybridity, and simulation are precisely what attract attention and engagement (Urry & Larsen, 2011). As such, the linguistic landscape does not merely reflect cultural values; it produces and distributes affect, making emotion itself a commodified layer of urban experience.

In sum, viewing West Street through the lens of assemblage and emotional economy reveals the productive instability of contemporary linguistic landscapes. These are not passive displays of language, but active infrastructures of feeling, where visitors' sensory and emotional investments are organized through semiotic experimentation, commercial strategy, and cultural play.

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