

# Commodification of culture and its value as a tourist resource: Drawing from the linguistic landscape of Yokohama Chinatown

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横浜中華街の言語景観から考える文化の商品化と観光資源としての価値

本研究ノートは、明治時代の開港時から国際都市として発展してきた横浜の代表的観光地である横浜中華街を取り上げる。再開発によって近未来的な街並みに生まれ変わりつつある横浜の中で、他の観光スポットとは異なる観光地として成長を遂げた横浜中華街について、現在までに積み上げられてきた多様な視点からの中華街研究を概観し、近年社会言語学の研究領域として注目されている言語景観研究及び観光社会学分野の文献調査から横浜中華街における言語使用と言語表示が作り出す景観が映し出す背景を捉えることを試みた。世界に存在するほとんどの中華街は中国系移民の生活を支える役割を果たしているが、横浜中華街においては訪れる観光客の90%以上がホスト社会の日本人であることが大きな特徴である。本稿では、この地に居住する人々のアイデンティティである中国文化が商品化され、再構成されてきた過程が周辺地域社会の中でどのような位置づけにあるのか、また、横浜中華街で生きる華僑や日本人にとってどのような意味を持つのかを言語景観を通して考察する。

近年日本における言語景観研究では、地域特性を量る言語景観研究、方言と歴史認識の関係や、景観の中で使用される文字種や使用言語の傾向分析、言語景観の多言語化やローカル化に関して公的機関による情報発信に焦点を当て考察した研究などが進められてきた(中井, ロング 2011)。本来、観光と言語は親和性が高く、言語景観の視座から横浜中華街の景観を形成している文字や使用言語を通して横浜中華街の観光地資源としての特性を明らかにすることで、地域性を活かした持続可能な観光地の魅力の向上につながっていくに違いない。

Keyword: 横浜中華街, 言語景観, 文化と言語の商品化

## 1. Introduction

Urban areas are characterized by an abundance of linguistic information. Signboards, posters, road signs, and tourist information boards decorated with assorted colors and fonts create a landscape of diverse impressions. This linguistic environment seen in public spaces is referred to as the “linguistic landscape”; and in recent years, the study of this phenomenon has become established in the field of sociolinguistics. Canadian linguists Landry and Bourhis first defined linguistic landscapes in their studies, in which they also explored ethnolinguistic vitality<sup>(1)</sup>. Since then, there has been a remarkable accumulation of ethnic community research on the visual display of multilingualism characteristics in complex modern society. Of the many ethnic communities that exist world wide abundant knowledge has been built up on the linguistic landscape of the Chinese community in particular. In addition to sociological studies that have pointed out its aspects as a representation of ideology, research on traditional Old Chinatowns has focused on how Chinese immigrants have lived in the area, the influence of local political agendas, and the nature

of ethnic minority communities. Such research has examined the area from an economic perspective. Jazul and Bernardo (2018) conducted a study of the differences between top-down and bottom-up contexts in the official labeling of Binondo Chinatown in Manila, pointing out the dominance of English over multilingualism in Manila society. Wu and Techasan (2016) investigated the linguistic landscape of Bangkok's Chinatown to explore how shop owners recognize the commodity value of the Chinese language and culture and how they use traditional Chinese in their sign names. On the dominance of English, a study of Singapore's Chinatown (Zhang, Tupas and Aman, 2020) has proven that there is a shift toward "English-dominant" from "English-knowing" in sociolinguistic situation in Singapore. Further, Tan (2014) demonstrated the friction and balancing act between the five official languages. Lou (2010) revealed the multilayered meanings that emerge in the linguistic landscape of Washington's Chinatown and how the use of Chinese has affected its transformation into a tourist attraction and has had an effect on the commodification of the "city."

There is a strong affinity between tourism and the linguistic landscapes that form public places, as language is the medium of tourists' cognition and communication. Since 2002, when then-Prime Minister of Japan declared Japan a "tourism-oriented nation" in his policy speech at the Diet, the public and private sectors have been working together to promote tourism with a particular focus on promoting foreign visitors to Japan. At that time, national and local governments began attempting to install road, station information, and evacuation signs in Roman characters, and improve the environment by introducing multilingual signs. In 2013, when the number of foreign visitors to Japan exceeded ten million, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism began to implement English-language signs around the Diet in response to complaints from foreign visitors that they could not understand Japanese signs. For example, "Kokkai Mae" was changed to "The National Diet" in English, "Eki" to "Sta. (station)" and "Dori" to "Ave. (Avenue)" to make it easier for foreign tourists to understand. Yamakawa (2019) elucidated tourism and language policies that the Japanese government has implemented since 2003 in detail in "Development and Prospects of Language Policies in Japan's Inbound Tourism Policies." In particular, the Action Program on tourism has been revised yearly, and its detailed contents cover various issues. The latest version, "Tourism Vision Realization Program," established a target of "Enhancing and Making Multilingual and Easy-to-Understand Explanations to Improve the Quality of Tourism Content: Using Native Experts at 200 Core Cultural Sightseeing Spots to Develop Advanced and High-Level Multilingual Explanation." Further, in 2018, the "Support Project for the Development of Multilingual Explanations on Local Tourist Resources" in tourist languages was established.

Described on the Yokohama City website as "a place where a variety of people and things meet and intersect,"<sup>(2)</sup> Yokohama is an international city that has welcomed and developed various cultures since it opened its port in 1859 after more than 200 years of national isolation. In past decades, with the redevelopment of the Minatomirai district, the city has grown remarkably as a tourist destination. In addition to the large commercial and amusement facilities that line the modern Minatomirai district, Yokohama Chinatown—completely different from other tourist attractions—is probably people's first choice as a tourist spot in Yokohama. This paper traces the history of the development of Yokohama Chinatown, a place where people can enjoy and experience an extraordinary landscape as if they were visiting a foreign land. Moreover, it examines its attractiveness as a tourist resource by comparing the commercialization and branding of Chinese culture reflected in the linguistic landscape in the current Yokohama Chinatown, employing the concepts from the field of tourism studies.

## 2. Yokohama Tourism and Linguistic Support

### (1) Current State of Tourism in Yokohama

The Yokohama Visitors' Guide website for tourists lists the following major tourist spots: Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse, Landmark Tower, Yokohama Cosmo World, Yamashita Park, Yokohama Port Osanbashi International Passenger Terminal, Cup Noodle Museum, Yokohama Museum of Art, and Yokohama Chinatown. The area was first redeveloped in the 1980s to unite Yokohama's two main districts—Kannai and Yokohama Station—and strengthen the city center. The area was originally home to shipyards, a cargo station, and port facilities, and was opened to the public in 1989 when the Yokohama Exposition was held. This led to the construction of several large architectural buildings, including hotels and the Landmark Tower, forming the core of the current landscape. Since then, the Minatomirai district has developed into a town that attracts tourists from Tokyo and neighboring prefectures, especially for its beautiful waterfront scenery. The district embraces streets lined with modern architectures—an important element of the city's urban development design—and includes the “Red Bus” route, a sightseeing tour bus that allows visitors to efficiently tour the area using a one-day pass.

The 2020 report, “The Trend of Visits to Cultural and Sightseeing Facilities and Events in Yokohama,”<sup>(3)</sup> released by the Yokohama City Culture and Tourism Bureau, is intended to “ascertain the actual conditions of awareness toward Yokohama, including the recognition rate of Yokohama's facilities and events and the degrees of penetration of the policies for the Creative City of Culture and Arts.” The purpose of the survey is to analyze the results of past questionnaires and provide basic data for concerning the introduction of appropriate policy measures. The results, drawn from a nationwide sample of 6,325 interviewees, show that the Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse, which has been renovated as a commercial building with a historical atmosphere, has the highest recognition and visit rates in the whole area. Shopping, eating, and drinking account for 40% of visits to Yokohama. The results of the 2019 Visitor Attraction Survey and the Dynamic Consumption Trends Survey also show that most visitors in Yokohama are day-trippers from the Tokyo area and surrounding cities, with only 10% of visitors staying overnight, representing one of the economic challenges that Yokohama faces.<sup>(4)</sup>

A survey of foreign visitors to Yokohama has been conducted since 2018 using roaming data<sup>(5)</sup>, and the numbers of daytime and nighttime visitors between January and September 2019 were 1,131,000 and 614,000, respectively. Travelers from China accounted for 31% of visitors, 16% from the United States, and 14.7% and 11.7% from Taiwan and South Korea, respectively; therefore, visitors from Asia accounted for more than 60% of the total. In terms of purpose, 81.6% of the visitors said they went sightseeing, and to participate in various activities, with the top reason being “eating Japanese food” followed by shopping. As Yokohama is a port city where large ships dock, the number of cruise passengers was on the rise prior to the global spread of COVID-19 from 2020 to 2021. However, cruise ship passengers, who stayed only one or two nights, were more likely to participate in sightseeing in Hakone or Fuji, which are close to hot spring resorts, rather than exploring the city. As of November 2021, the number of domestic tourists from Tokyo and neighboring prefectures is recovering, while that of foreign tourists visiting Japan remains low. However, although depending on the state of the pandemic and the response of the Japanese government, it is expected that the number of cruise passengers and visitors participating in MICE<sup>(6)</sup> will rise substantially in the future once the ban on accepting tourists from overseas is lifted.

## (2) Measures to Accept Inbound Tourists

In response to the recent increase in inbound tourists to Japan, as well as for communication purposes, Yokohama City has taken measures to provide a multilingual version of information boards and pamphlets. In particular, Yokohama was selected among the twelve host cities for the Rugby World Cup to be held in Japan in October 2019. Further, in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics that were to be held in 2020, the city prepared the “Manual on Measures to Accept Foreign Visitors to Japan” and held cultural understanding courses for tourism-related businesses. The manual contains information on the visitors’ various cultural backgrounds, a collection of sample dialogues in four languages fit for different situations, and tourist information websites. The manual, along with the “Guidebook for Welcoming Foreign Tourists with Diverse Cultures and Customs,” is available on the Yokohama Convention Bureau’s official website<sup>(7)</sup> as part of “multilingual support services for tourism businesses.” Moreover, the “Pocket Emergency Guide” is available in English for use in the event of an earthquake or disaster as well as websites that can be accessed in English, Korean, traditional Chinese characters, and Simplified Chinese characters. From October 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017, according to the 2020 business report of the Yokohama Convention Bureau<sup>(8)</sup> as one of the language measures for inbound visitors to Japan, the Yokohama City Transportation Bureau, in cooperation with Yamaha Corporation, used Omotenashi Guide, a system that uses acoustic communication to send multilingual text information to smartphones. The system supports Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, French and Spanish. The established goal of the experiment was to realize a multilingual guide system that will help foreign visitors in Japan and passengers who have difficulty hearing to increase the comfort during their journey.

In accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism, public signs such as road signs in Yokohama’s sightseeing areas are written in four languages: Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese (simplified Chinese characters.) However, except for the Osanbashi Pier where foreign ships dock, most of the signs in historical buildings and commercial establishments are limited to two languages: Japanese and English. Moreover, there are many tourist spots that only display signs in Japanese. Positive consideration has to be given to this issue as language is a medium of obtaining essential information for visitors from inside and outside of the prefecture and the increasing number of independent foreign tourists. This allows them to enjoy sightseeing comfortably without getting lost. The dominance of English in the linguistic landscape is significantly influenced by its political background, as seen in the aforementioned studies of Singapore and Malaysia. In Japan, too, one of the major policies of the Ministry of Education, Sports, Culture, Science and Technology is to promote the development of English proficiency at all levels for an increasingly interdependent global society. This means the government politically recognizes the importance and prestige of the language.



### 3. Development of the Tourist Attraction “Yokohama Chinatown”

#### (1) What Kind of Town is Yokohama Chinatown?



London Chinatown



Yokohama Chinatown

Ethnic towns have been established worldwide, and various ethnic groups often converge in those areas to build a community. Among them, Chinatowns host Chinese communities.

According to Yamashita (2016), who has made significant achievements in the study of Chinese communities around the world, Yokohama Chinatown, Kobe Nankinmachi (nan jing ting), and Nagasaki Shinchi (xin di) Chinatown—the three major Chinatowns in Japan—are all considered representative local tourist attractions. However, many Chinatowns in North America and Southeast Asia are not necessarily considered touristic areas. These towns are ethnic communities that coexist with the host society; they provide services for people of Chinese descent. For the residents of the host society, Chinatown is usually a place to go out to eat and is not perceived as a tourist attraction. Some Chinatowns, such as the Chinatowns in London and New York are crowded with international tourists. However, the Old Chinatowns in Vancouver, San Francisco, Sydney and Melbourne, which the author visited, appear to be places where Chinese people live and preserve their traditions and are not considered attractive tourist resources in the same way as Yokohama Chinatown. Notably, 60 percent of the world’s Chinese population resides in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, other than the Chinatowns of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, which have become important tourist destinations, there are no other Chinatowns that stand out like them. This is because they represent retail and whole sale centers, and Chinese culture is unlikely to evoke touristic interest for the people of the host society (Yamashita 2019).

In Japan, one of the main characteristics of traditional Chinatowns in Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama is that they have become important tourist attractions in their own right. Most of their visitors are from the host society. On the weekends, the places are completely occupied by Japanese people of all ages and genders enjoying the exotic and unique atmosphere of Chinatown; few examples of similar features can be found overseas. Originally, the function of Chinatown was to provide services to Chinese immigrants, and the abovementioned Chinatowns in Japan previously focused on this function. Presently, they have evolved into commercial areas with a concentration of Chinese restaurants and Chinese product shops targeting mainly Japanese people. Yokohama Chinatown is the largest of the three Chinatowns and according to Yamashita’s survey (2019), there are 458 shops in this area, 224 of which are Chinese restaurants. In fact, people visit not only for the food but also for the town’s charming, exotic atmosphere, which has preserved its traditions despite its transformation.

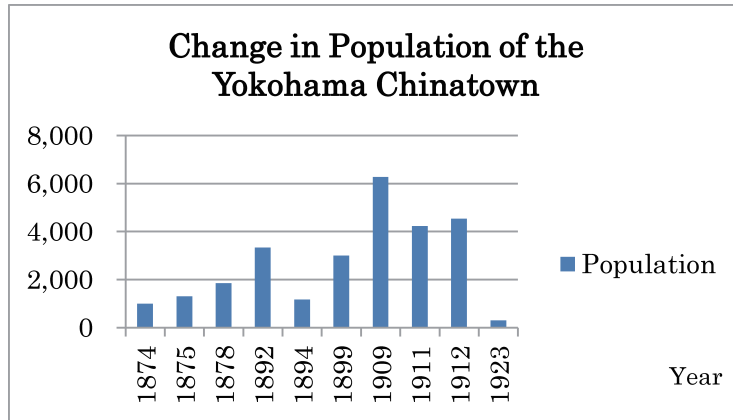
Since the opening of the port, Yokohama Chinatown was established over a long period by Kakyo (hua qiao), resident Chinese immigrants Chinese people from overseas, and naturalized Chinese people (hua ren). Kensei Hayashi (2010), the managing director of the Chinese restaurant Wanchenlou, states in his book that Yokohama Chinatown was repeatedly destroyed and reconstructed between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until the 1990s that it finally stabilized. Chinatown is “like a bunch of grapes, with a variety of Chinese cultures connected to one another; the food, the festivals, the events, the language, the people, the buildings, the gates, the religions, the fortune-telling, and even the daily customs all form a cluster of grapes. Visitors to Yokohama Chinatown can feel the distinct and exotic atmospheres as soon as they step into the town.” (Hayashi, 2010, 88) He states that Yokohama Chinatown has many things to be proud of, among which are that it is safe, attracts the largest number of visitors among Chinatowns in the world, and has a few Kakyo—Chinese from overseas. The term “Kakyo” usually refers to Chinese residents who form Chinese communities in different parts of the world. However, in China, those who hold Chinese nationality while living abroad are generally referred to as Kakyo “hua qiao,” while those who have already acquired foreign nationality are called Kajin “huaren” (Yamashita, 2019).

A sense of the unexpected or extraordinary is a key element in sightseeing, and passing through the pailou arch on the border to Yokohama Chinatown is an uplifting experience as if you were entering a foreign land. Yet the food is suitable for Japanese palates, and restaurant workers shout their spiels to customers in Japanese. Hayashi (2010, 90) notes, “Chinatowns around the world are for the Chinese, but Yokohama Chinatown is for the Japanese. To recover from the devastation of World War II, Yokohama Chinatown decided to do business with Japanese people, not with their own countrymen. Simultaneously, for the Chinese people living here, this Chinatown remains as an important place, like a forever home.” Hayashi continues, “It is important for this town to bustle with activity and make business viable to preserve this place for our children and grandchildren. Based on this idea, we have overcome many difficulties when building the town.”

## (2) Yokohama and the Chinese

In 1854, commodore Perry of the U.S. fleet landed in Yokohama after Western countries urged Japan to open its doors, which had been closed to the outside world for 250 years. At that time, Yokohama was a village with a population of approximately 100 people who lived by fishing and farming. In 1858, Japan concluded a treaty of amity and commerce with five countries—the United States, the Netherlands, Russia, Britain, and France—and opened the ports of Kanagawa (Yokohama), Nagasaki, Hakodate, Hyogo (Kobe), and Niigata. After the Opium War, foreign merchants who had been trading in Shanghai and Hong Kong began to arrive in Yokohama one after another, accompanied by Chinese people who had been engaged in the work of their trading houses. The Chinese people, who spoke English and were familiar with Western culture, were called maiban. They could communicate with the Japanese and were familiar with business customs, which made them useful in negotiations. They began to live near the foreign settlement and, therefore, “Tangren town” was born (Ito, 2018). The main occupations of the Chinese immigrants who scattered to North and South America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were related to primary industries. However, the Chinese who came to Yokohama were engaged in the tertiary industries, including, for instance, service and commerce. Moreover, Chinese people who had acquired new Western technology came to Yokohama and played an important role in the construction of Western-style buildings in the settlement as carpenters and painters. At that time, technologies were introduced such as English letterpress printing for English

language newspapers and restaurant menus, as well as other sectors such as Western musical instrument manufacturing. The most common occupations were “san ba dao,” which meant “three blades”—indicating tailoring, hair dressing, and cooking.



(Compiled by the author from “The Formation and Development of the Overseas Chinese Society in Yokohama” 2018)

Examining the population of Yokohama Chinatown from 1874 to 1923 shows how the area has undergone many changes over the years, with many people returning to mainland China during the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. In 1923, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck the Kanto region, causing entire brick houses in the district to collapse and killing approximately 2,000 people, dramatically reducing the Chinese population in the area. In 1945, at the end of World War II, the Tojin gai (tang ren jie) Chinatown was again devastated by an air raid.

### (3) Transformation from Ethnic Town to Tourist Attraction

Ethnic symbols are created to promote ethnic towns as tourist attractions. Chinatown’s symbol is the pailou arch; there are now ten of these in Yokohama Chinatown. In 1953, when then-mayor of Yokohama was on a tour of inspection in the United States, he visited San Francisco’s Chinatown and was inspired by its bustling atmosphere.



In 1955, the Shanlin gate was built, and the area that had been called “Nankinmachi” was renamed “Chuka Gai” Chinatown. The meaning behind the Shanlin gate is “This is not China; we live in Japan. Therefore, this community must get along with our neighbors, the Japanese,” which represents the belief of the people in Chinatown (Hayashi 2010).

In 1971, the Yokohama Chinatown Development Association was established in cooperation with Chinese and Japanese businesses in Chinatown to further improve and develop the town in the wake of the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka. With the restoration of diplomatic relations between Japan and China 1972, a friendly atmosphere was reestablished. Especially after two giant pandas were presented to Japan by the government of People’s Republic of China, “panda fever” and a Chinese boom arose. The ethnic boom, travel boom, and gourmet food boom that followed during the bubble economy of the 1980s increased interest in Yokohama Chinatown. Further, the influence of media such as television travel pro-

grams and magazine features led to the formation of a “tourist gaze”<sup>(9)</sup> on this area that was distinct from that of other tourist destinations in Yokohama. The current image of Yokohama Chinatown as a tourist destination has only been shaped over the past 40 years. This is a result of the efforts of the Chinatown residents, conscious of their own roots, to set themselves apart from other tourist destinations by taking advantage of the characteristics of Chinese culture and simultaneously blend in and be accepted in Japan (Hayashi 2010).

Although many events make Yokohama Chinatown a bustling location, the most distinctive is the Chinese New Year Festival, which started in the late 1980s and is the reason for the current prosperity of the city. The Guan Yu Festival, Mazu Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and other traditional events in Yokohama’s Chinatown based on traditional Chinese culture and beliefs started one after another and continue contributing significantly to the promotion of tourism in the area. A survey report conducted by Yokohama City also shows that the Chinese New Year Festival is widely known among other events. The Guan Yu Temple, another important attraction dedicated to Guan Yu, the god of commerce, is a constant source of support for the people living in Chinatown. However, according to Iida’s research (2011), the Mazu Temple had been in existence since the early days of Yokohama Chinatown. However, when plans were made to build condominiums on the main street, the land was purchased and built over the objections of the residents. It was built as part of the city’s efforts to make Yokohama Chinatown a tourist attraction. “Festivals such as the Guan-ti-Sai and Mazu-Sai will not be canceled regardless because to cancel even one festival would mean losing the trust of many people. Children and older adults, who look forward to the festival every year, young people who work hard to make it worth their while, and the numerous tourists who come from far and wide to see the festival—we cannot betray the trust they have placed in the city. Yokohama Chinatown must continue to be a town that keeps its promises” (Hayashi 2010).

In the process of Chinatown’s development as a tourist destination, Chinese culture was rejuvenated to attract tourists. As Hayashi notes, the middle-aged Kakyo Chinese people, who carry Chinatown on their backs, are trying to spark the younger generation’s sense of identity by reviving traditional Chinese culture for tourism. While the officials of Kobe Nankinmachi and Nagasaki Shinchi have a policy of staging their own Chinatown as a “theme park” (Ohashi 2000, 25), Yokohama Chinatown does not regard itself as such. For the Chinese who have lived and created in this area since the beginning of the Meiji era, this town embodies Chinese culture, a world that differs from theme parks, whose stage production, Disneyland-like nature creates combinations of simulacra<sup>(10)</sup> unfolding without reality.

## 4. The Linguistic Landscape of Yokohama Chinatown

### (1) Commodification and Branding

To examine the linguistic landscape of Chinatown as a tourist spot, from the standpoint of visitors as recipients of information, the characteristics of the town were analyzed, focusing on the main street, Chinatown Boulevard, based on 764 photographs and fixed-point observations taken during field research between 2019 and 2021.



Yokohama Chinatown is an in-group space with an area of approximately 500 square meters that stretches around Yamashita-cho in Naku, Yokohama. The town is surrounded on all sides by ten gates. One



of the characteristics of this area is that there is a clear distinction between the inside and the outside, as there are no buildings reminiscent of Chinese culture outside of the pailou arches set up around its perimeter of this area. William (2016), who investigated Chinatown in Liverpool, UK, discussed the linguistic landscape as a tool for representing the relationship between ethnically defined space and identity; however, interviews with actual visitors revealed that the said demarcation was ambiguous. For example, the names of streets within the boundary of Liverpool's Chinatown are in English, suggesting that its function is not only that of a tourist attraction but that of one of the city districts inhabited by ethnic minorities. In Yokohama Chinatown, Chinese names and Chinese scripts are used for streets within the boundary, emphasizing that this space is different from the outside.

There is a tourist information center called ChinaTown80 just after entering the Chaoyang Gate (Fig. 1). A Chinatown Concierge is stationed there to introduce the area. Pamphlets are available in four languages, including the Yokohama Visitor's Guide (Fig. 2), as well as pamphlets for many shops (mostly in Japanese only). A notice in the washroom next to the center had information in four languages, Japanese, Simplified Chinese, English and Portuguese (Fig. 3). It is not common to find Portuguese signs in tourism areas; It is presumed that there was a request from Brazilian workers in the area. The Yokohama Chinatown Development Association's "I ♥ Chinatown" website is available not only in Japanese but also in Spanish, Thai, German, Hindi, French, Malay, English, Korean, and Chinese (traditional and simplified). The website of the Yokohama Chinatown Development Association Cooperative includes tabs for "Shops," "Events," "Seasonal Specials," and "Tourist Guide," and the "Shops" tab, for example, contains categories for "Restaurants," "Chinese Food Stores," "Confectionery and Souvenir Shops," "Clothing, Sundries, and Craft Stores," "Fortune Telling," "Relaxation," and "Sightseeing and Amusement," each with several related shops. Restaurants account for the largest number at 171, followed by 38 cafes and 28 confectionery and souvenir shops. Information on 18 tourist amusement facilities, is available, including a shop where visitors can have their picture taken wearing Chinese dresses, a game center, a museum, an aquarium, and two religious facilities—Guandimiao and Mazumiao. In *Selling the City: Language, Ethnicity and Commodified Space* (2010), Leeman and Modan argue that multilingual displays serve as commodity markers because they provide tourists with excitement and exoticism for souvenirs and mementos. Further, the language used is valued as an expression of ethnic consciousness and authenticity. Indeed, the linguistic landscape, including the souvenirs developed in Yokohama Chinatown, functions as a source of Chinese culture and contains devices to maximize its appeal as a branded tourist destination.

Mizo-o (2011) categorizes tourism resources as part of Natural Resources and Humanistic Resources I and II. Humanistic Resources I correspond to "those created by human beings, whose value has been discovered over a long period of time, and whose standing has been established today." Humanistic Resources



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

II represent those that have a strong ability to attract visitors at present but whose strength to maintain their ability to attract visitors in the future is uncertain. Yokohama Chinatown falls into the category of “streetscape, urban scenery, and buildings” under Humanistic Resources II. However, as it possesses intangible social resources such as customs, habits, and language, it also belongs to the category of Humanistic Resources I. The members of the Yokohama Chinatown Development Association Cooperative in Yokohama Chinatown are making efforts to keep the level of evaluation high in order to ensure that Chinatown tourism is a sustainable resource. Moreover, from the viewpoint of the streetscape as a human resource, Yokohama Chinatown is also valuable as an object of urban tourism.

Urban tourism, also called city tourism, draws in visitors by highlighting the charm of the area and utilizing it for urban development. Urban tourism has the unique effect of raising the area’s profile and promoting cross-cultural understanding among tourists who visit it. In these areas, a concentration of restaurants, amusement establishments, shopping, and experiences touch on the history and culture of the city. Additionally, the city’s government, tourism-related organizations, and private commercial entities, such as the shops and residents of Yokohama Chinatown, all share the goal of urban tourism.

In “The Tourist Gaze” (2014), sociologist John Urry discusses the visitors’ interest toward touristic destinations. Urry categorizes the tourist gaze into two categories, one of which is the “romantic gaze.” “The ‘romantic’ gaze seeks ‘beauty in its natural state.’” Tourists who want to experience something that is rare, local, and has a sense of “authenticity” go sightseeing with a “romantic” gaze. Conversely, Urry called the tendency of tourists to gather in a place where other people are gathering a “collective” gaze. They do not have a sense of “authenticity” but are interested in the fact that people regroup in that area. This gaze is accompanied by an atmosphere of fellowship, and even in Yokohama’s Chinatown, many people gathered at places accompanied by others who share the same experience, providing “the pleasure, the festive mood, the liveliness of seeing the same place” (Urry 2014, 30). This feeling is natural for tourists visiting Chinatown, even if they are not aware of it, and they also feel a sense of “authenticity,” although it is slightly different from the abovementioned romantic gaze. As part of its efforts to make Yokohama Chinatown a sustainable tourist destination, the Yokohama Chinatown Development Association Cooperative held the Yokohama Chinatown Film Festival in March 2021, with the first three short films set in Yokohama Chinatown and released online, and the second two in the spring and summer. The directors of the films created their works by discussing what the people living in Yokohama Chinatown want to pass on, such as discoveries and new encounters through cross-cultural exchanges among the third and fourth generations, as well as the creativity and traditions that arise from Yokohama Chinatown.<sup>(11)</sup> *Hana no Sumika* was released in August 2021 and was well received. By adapting the story of overseas Chinese people living in Yokohama’s Chinatown, the film shares the history, life, and thoughts of the people of Chinatown. According to Urry, the symbols produced by media such as film and television reinforce the tourists’ gaze, and the release of documentary films is expected to allow people to rediscover the semiotics that already exist and to create new ones, strengthening the image of Yokohama Chinatown.

## (2) A Townscape Characterized by the Linguistic Landscape

As Yamashita (2016) points out, Yokohama Chinatown as a tourist resource was “constructed for Japanese visitors.” The fact that it is intended for Japanese people, the residents of the host society, is clearly evident in the linguistic landscape. The scenery of Yokohama Chinatown is characterized by an emphasis on Chinese appearances, such as the use of color, creating an atmosphere that Japanese visitors consider

“Chinese.” In the center of Chinatown Boulevard is a conspicuous group of signboards for restaurants, while Chinese souvenir shops stand abreast. Visualized traditional Chinese characters can be mainly seen on restaurant signs. Yokohama Chinatown was originally inhabited by immigrants and their descendants from Hong Kong, Shanghai, and other southeastern regions of the Chinese mainland, as well as Taiwan. Therefore, it has always used traditional Chinese characters. Japanese people, who have long been influenced by this Chinese culture and have incorporated Chinese characters into their writing system, have no problem understanding traditional Chinese characters, even if they are characterized by an older style. None of the shop signs lining Chinatown Boulevard use simplified Chinese characters. However, the fact that those characters were implemented in the 1950s in the People’s Republic of China does not seem to have affected Yokohama Chinatown, where traditional Chinese culture was well established. Only one shop sells precious stones with English signs, and no other shops has information in English (Fig. 5). The English words “lunch” and “take out,” which can be found in all commercial areas in Japan, are used on all-you-can-eat menu signs. Nevertheless, they are not intended for native English speakers; they are merely used for convenience.

English-only restaurant signs were not found on Chinatown Boulevard; as for the information monuments placed at historical sites, indicating that they are tourist attractions, some have information written in both Japanese and English (Fig. 6). However, most provide only Japanese explanations.



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

According to Bao (2015, 90–97), who compared Chinatown in Boston and New York to the one in Yokohama, the linguistic landscape of Chinatowns in the United States is characterized by a combination of residential and commercial areas, with Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese restaurants, as well as shops selling goods from each country. The language used is mainly a combination of traditional Chinese and other languages, including Vietnamese, a mixture of English and Vietnamese, Korean and English, a mixture of English and Chinese dialects, Chinese using Japanese kanji, and a combination of Hiragana phonetic scripts<sup>(12)</sup> and English. In contrast, the language display combinations decorating Yokohama Chinatown are mostly in traditional Chinese characters, Hiragana, and Katakana. Most information at souvenir shops, amusement and fortune-telling shops, and parking lots is in Japanese only.



Figure 7



Figure 8

According to the survey in Bao's study (2015, 98), there is one warning sign in Yokohama Chinatown with only simplified characters, but the author could not find it during her town's exploration in 2021. Similarly, there is also one signboard that read "No Garbage" in Japanese, English, Chinese (simplified and traditional), Korean, Tagalog, and Portuguese.<sup>(Fig. 7)</sup> It is not common to see such a multilingual warning sign. However, this one, in particular, was placed in front of a seven-story shopping mall called China Square, and it seems to have been intended for the multinational employees working there. The china square accommodates fortune-tellers and a Brazilian restaurant as well as grocery stores, Chinese confectionary shops, cafes, and an aquarium. Prohibitive signs are most likely aimed at employees of restaurants run by new Chinese settlers, who have recently been increasing in number in Chinatown<sup>(Fig. 8)</sup>. The fact that the language signs posted in this Chinatown are clearly aimed at Japanese tourists can be inferred as there are considerably few signs in traditional Chinese, English, or Korean, although the largest number of foreign visitors to Japan has been from China, following those from Korea and America.<sup>(13)</sup>

The Yokohama Chinatown "Machizukuri" Organization Federation, which was formed by 23 organizations, exchanges information among the members to keep abreast of trends in the area. The Yokohama Chinatown Chapter of the Yokohama Chinatown Charter was created by the association to help solve various issues and revitalize the area. The trademark of this Chapter is "We Are Chinatown," which shows that Chinatown is a place in which residents are proud to live.

## 5. Conclusion

Although there is almost no previous research on the linguistic landscape of Old Chinatowns in Japan, numerous studies on Chinatown itself can be found in the field of human geography and Asian research, and this draws on our findings. The fact that Yokohama Chinatown has undergone many changes since the opening of the port of Yokohama has significantly influenced the formation of the modern Yokohama Chinatown and created a unique linguistic landscape.

Yokohama Chinatown, which has established itself in Japanese society and acquired the role of the largest Chinatown in Japan, is a valuable tourist resource and boosts the attractiveness of Yokohama. The linguistic landscape of Yokohama Chinatown includes a unique feature: most of the visitors are residents of the host society—mainly Japanese people. The function of Chainatown's linguistic environment is that of marketing the importance of its historical and cultural background and traditions to the residents. Simultaneously, it makes the residents of the host society aware of the existence of the Chinese language and conveys that this place exists as a tourist destination with exotic attractions. Although it was not possible to interview storeowners during this study, it was possible to understand their intentions from the language and character types used on the signs, as well as non-verbal elements such as decorative designs and colors.

Modern Yokohama is beginning to take on a new dimension. As of January 1, 2021, the number of registered foreigners in Kanagawa Prefecture was 226,766, or approximately one in 41 of the prefecture's residents, 71,386 of whom are Chinese. The number of people of foreign origins in Yokohama is 102,248, of which 40,479 are of Chinese descent.<sup>(14)</sup> The foreign residents of Yokohama come from more than 170 countries and regions, and the city's elementary schools are attended by students of various nationalities. The city continues to develop as a coexisting society with people of multicultural backgrounds. Many of the restaurants in Yokohama's Chinatown are run by Chinese people; however, many of the food stores and tableware shops that support them are run by the Japanese, making it a symbiotic society.

Understanding Yokohama's dynamic history and how it has developed is an important key to building a multicultural society. Yokohama's Chinatown is an interesting tourist destination for Japanese people in terms of approaches to understanding one's own culture, as well as other cultures. However, it is also a place where the third and fourth generations of Chinese residents develop their identities. Recently, considerable attention has been paid to situations where newcomers form communities in places different from those of other people who have lived for a long time. Globally, most traditional Chinatowns (Old Chinatowns) are located in urban areas, but in recent years, new Chinatowns have been formed in the suburbs as well (Yamashita, 2019). Since the 1990s, the increase in new Chinese immigrants has effected a major transformation in Japan's Chinatowns. As new immigrants have moved into the traditional Chinatown, the traditional landscape and image of Chinatown have been drastically altered by changes that can be seen, for example, in shops and cuisine. New Chinese immigrants have also formed communities in the neighborhoods of Yokohama Chinatown, and these communities are having a significant impact on the local society. Therefore, undeniably, Chinatown will become more diverse as Japanese society becomes more pluralistic. The study of linguistic landscapes in ethnic communities has the potential to clarify the background of Japanese society, which is progressively becoming more diverse and stratified.

#### Notes:

- (1) Landry, R. and Bourhis, R.Y. defined linguistic landscape as "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration." (1997, 25)
- (2) Yokohama City Office Home Page ([yokohama.lg.jp](http://yokohama.lg.jp)), September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021
- (3) Culture and Tourism Bureau, 0026\_20210324.pdf, [yokohama.lg.jp](http://yokohama.lg.jp), September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021
- (4) Yokohama Johobako, 'the number of inbound tourists to Yokohama is 3,420'  
<https://yokohama-infoblog.com/yokohamatourists-2019-info>, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021
- (5) By using data accumulated by foreign tourists visiting Japan using their own mobile phones, nationality and location information are specified.
- (6) MICE = Meeting, Incentive, Convention, Exposition
- (7) 'Omotenashi Guidebook for visitors with various cultural background', [omotenashi.pdf](http://omotenashi.pdf), [yokohamajapan.com](http://yokohamajapan.com), October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021
- (8) Yokohama Convention Bureau Official Site, [yokohamajapan.com](http://yokohamajapan.com), October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021
- (9) The idea of 'tourist gaze' was advocated by John Urry, and it remains one of the most influential concepts in tourism research and is still widely quoted and relevant today. A major criticism of his work is that too much emphasis is placed on the visual aspects of being a tourist rather than the whole experience.
- (10) The Cambridge English Dictionary describes simulacra as copies that depict things that either had no reality to begin with, or that no longer have an original. The example is rides and characters in the facilities of Disneyland.

- (11) Hana no Sumika Official Home Page, <https://www.hananosumika.com>, Oct 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021
- (12) Ordinary written Japanese employs a mix ture of “kanji”, Chinese characters, together with two syllabic alphabets known as “Hiragana” and “Katakana”.
- (13) Inbound tourists’ statistics 2021, JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co, <https://www.tourism/-database/stats/inbound>, 4th September, 2021
- (14) Kanagawa Prefectural Government Home Page, The statistics of foreign residents in Kanagawa Prefecture, <https://www.pref.kanagawa.jp>, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021

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#### ABSTRACT

This research note focuses on Yokohama Chinatown, one of the remarkable tourist attractions of Yokohama. Yokohama has developed into an international city since the opening of the port in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and being reborn as a futuristic cityscape due to progressive redevelopment in the past ten years. Yokohama Chinatown has grown into a tourist destination quite distinct from the city's other hotspots. This research note investigates the use of language and its public display in Yokohama Chinatown. It draws on various studies of Chinatowns the world over and research in the fields of linguistic landscape, tourism sociology and sociolinguistics. These areas of research have attracted interest in recent years.

Most of the Chinatowns in the world play a role in supporting the lives of Chinese immigrants; notably, however, more than 90% of the visitors Yokohama Chinatown are Japanese. This research note will discuss how the process of representing and commodifying Chinese culture, has influenced the wider community, as well as Kakyō (huaqiao), the Chinese inhabitants of Yokohama Chinatown. It also considers what this marketing approach means for the residents of the area. In recent years, linguistic landscape research in Japan has focused on regional characteristics, the relationship between dialects and historical recognition, trend analysis of character types and languages used in landscapes (Nakai, Long 2011). Also under examination have been multilingualisation and localization of linguistic landscapes focusing on the dissemination of information by public institutions. Promoting the language and characters which form the linguistic landscape of Yokohama Chinatown as a tourism resource achieves a sense of the unique nature of the district. Such exploitation of the linguistic landscape of Yokohama Chinatown must lead to the improvement of the area as an attractive and sustainable tourist destination.

Keywords: Yokohama Chinatown; commodification of culture and language; linguistic landscape