

Investigating the Indigenous Linguistic Landscape of a Historic Block along the Grand Canal in China

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Abstract

This study utilised the Geosemiotics Framework proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2003) to examine the linguistic landscape of Dadou Road Historic Block in Hangzhou, China. A total of 678 signs were photographed and analyzed for language choice, code preference, and emplacement. Results show that Chinese is the dominant language in this linguistic landscape, appearing on 96.8 percent of signs, while English is the second most common language (34.1 percent). Other languages, such as Japanese, Korean, and French, appear less frequently. On bilingual and multilingual signs, Chinese is prioritized through positioning, font size, and color. Most signs are appropriately placed to activate their intended meanings and connect with the sociocultural context. However, the limited number of foreign languages on private signs does not reflect the diversity of potential international tourists. The findings highlight the influence of the Grand Canal on the region's linguistic landscape and the role of tourism in shaping language use in public spaces.

Keywords

Linguistic Landscape, Grand Canal, Historic Block, Geosemiotics Framework

1. Introduction

This study investigated the linguistic landscape of Dadou Road Historic Block located along the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal in Hangzhou, China. The Beijing-Hangzhou Canal, also known as the Grand Canal, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the longest canal in the world (UNESCO, 2014). It stretches from Beijing in the north to Hangzhou in the south, covering a distance of 1,794 kilometers. Since ancient times, the Grand Canal has been crucial to China's political,

cultural, and economic development as a main route for the movement of people and goods. The Dadou Road Historic Block, situated along this waterway, has been shaped by the canal's influence and has become a testament to the region's history and cultural heritage (Zhang et al., 2023).

The Dadou Road Historic Block is built along the east side of the Grand Canal. Currently, it is 780 meters long from north to south and 150 meters wide from east to west. It borders the Ming and Qing dynasty canal tax office, Beixin Customs, to the north, the Qing dynasty granary, Fuyi Granary, to the south, and one of the three major temples outside Hangzhou during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Xiangji Temple, to the east. The streets in the block are paved with large stone slabs and stone blocks, and the buildings primarily feature a white wall and black tile style, creating a rustic and elegant ambiance.

According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the term "linguistic landscape" refers to any visible text in public areas, which includes a wide range of notices, signs, and advertisements put up by both public and private organisations. Understanding linguistic landscapes can provide insights into how language is used in a given location, how well language policies are implemented, and how language interacts with the sociocultural and economic development of a region (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). A former trading place for the fish market and rice market in Hangzhou, Dadou Road Historic Block is now a historical and cultural block that integrates commerce, tourism, cultural leisure, and heritage protection, making it intriguing to study its linguistic landscape (Li & Wang, 2021).

2. Literature Review

The study of linguistic landscapes was first introduced by Landry and Bourhis (1997), who emphasised how these landscapes reflect the status and vitality of various language groups in a given area. Although their work served as a springboard for later studies, it was primarily concerned with the symbolic meaning of language signs and did not delve deeply into the social and cultural contexts in which they were embedded. The Geosemiotics Framework, which takes into account the interplay between visual semiotics, place semiotics, and interaction order in linguistic landscapes, was proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2003). By placing language signs within a larger material and social context, this framework broadens the perspective of linguistic landscape research and aids in illuminating the intricate interactions between language use and power, ideology, and identity. It does have certain drawbacks, though, including a lack of focus on the subtler aspects of interaction and occasionally unduly subjective interpretations of visual cues.

The 2009 edited volume "*Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery*" by Shohamy and Gorter covers a variety of topics, including language policy, identity, language attitudes, and multiculturalism. It brings together theoretical discussions and empirical studies from various scholars. While showcasing the enormous potential of linguistic landscape research, this work also emphasises

the necessity of increased interdisciplinary discussion. From a social semiotic perspective, [Jaworski and Thurlow \(2010\)](#) investigate the connections between linguistic landscapes and phenomena like globalisation, tourism, and commerce. They highlight the significance of linguistic landscapes in defining place identities and communicating cultural values. The agency of individual actors in the construction and interpretation of linguistic landscapes, however, may occasionally be overlooked by their method.

There has been a growing emphasis in linguistic landscape research methodology to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches. A methodical review of the use of quantitative techniques, such as data collection, coding, and statistical analysis, in linguistic landscape research is given by [Barni and Bagna \(2015\)](#). Although their work provides researchers with a highly operational guide, it might not fully capture the subtleties and complexity of linguistic landscapes. [Blommaert \(2013\)](#) promotes the use of ethnographic techniques in linguistic landscape research, delving into the socio-cultural contexts of language use and revealing the ideologies and power dynamics that underlie linguistic landscapes through fieldwork observation and interviews. Although this method provides deep insights, it might not be universally applicable or easily replicated.

The relationship between linguistic landscapes and identity construction has become a growing focus of linguistic landscape research in recent years. In their edited volume “*Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes*,” [Blackwood et al. \(2016\)](#) highlight the socio-political importance of linguistic landscape research by examining how linguistic landscapes shape national, ethnic, class, and gender identities. This study broadens the focus of linguistic landscape research to include a deeper examination of topics like identity, ideology, and power dynamics in addition to the initial description and analysis of linguistic facts. To obtain a more thorough grasp of linguistic landscapes, it also highlights the necessity of increased interdisciplinary collaboration with disciplines like sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and anthropology.

The field of linguistic landscape research has experienced notable advancements in theory and methodology. Researchers have undertaken in-depth analyses of the linguistic landscapes of a range of contexts, including tourist destinations ([Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2015](#)), business districts ([Deng, 2015](#)), and ethnic minority settlements ([Laitinen, 2014](#)). Further research is still required on particular kinds of linguistic landscapes, especially those found in historic and cultural districts. By focusing on the linguistic landscape of Dadou Road Historic Block, this study aims to shed light on the complex interplay between language, culture, and identity in a historically and culturally significant area. Examining the linguistic landscape of this block can reveal how language is used to represent and negotiate the area’s rich history, cultural heritage, and contemporary development.

The present study’s research questions were developed from preliminary observations of the linguistic landscape in the Dadou Road Historic Block. During

initial visits to this area, it was noticed that the block had a diverse array of signs with different combinations, languages, and layouts. The signage seemed to serve a variety of purposes, including informational, commercial, and cultural heritage display. Furthermore, it appeared that the signage's positioning and layout had an impact on the neighborhood. These real-life observations, along with the theoretical framework of Geosemiotics proposed by Scollon & Scollon (2003), informed the development of the following research questions:

RQ1: Which languages, along with their frequencies and combinations, are displayed in Dadou Road Historic Block's linguistic landscape?

RQ2: On bilingual or multilingual signs, how are the various languages distributed and arranged to represent their relative importance and priority?

RQ3: Are the signs positioned correctly to fulfil their intended purposes, activate their intended meanings, and create connections with the surrounding social and cultural context?

3. Methods

3.1. Instrument and Data Collection

A digital camera was used to capture images of signage in the Dadou Road Historic Block (an area of 95,000 m²). To ensure a representative sample of the block's linguistic landscape, the researcher photographed all visible signs, both public and private, covering all major alleys and public spaces within the area. In total, 678 images were collected over two consecutive afternoons in August. The photographs were later coded and catalogued to identify the characteristics of the signage, such as the number of languages used on a single sign or the proportion of English to non-English languages. The results were then analysed to discover patterns for this historic block. The data pool includes various forms of signage, including street signs, traffic signs, house number plates, name plates of state-owned businesses and government institutions, propaganda slogans, introduction boards for scenic spots, and safety notices in the public sector. Private sector signs were primarily found on storefronts, on building exteriors, and on glass doors/windows at entrances and other noticeable locations.

3.2. Analysis

Analysis was conducted on the collected data of 678 images, focusing on three aspects according to Scollon and Scollon's (2003) Geosemiotic Framework, that is, language choice, code preference, and emplacement. For language choice, types of languages shown on the signs, the number of languages used, and the patterns of language combinations were examined. Eight languages were identified in the data. They are Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, French, Dutch, Italian and Sanskrit. The number of languages on each sign was counted to categorize the sign into monolingual, bilingual and multilingual (three or more languages) ones. The specific language pairings on bilingual and multilingual signs were also noted. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percen-

tages, were calculated for each language cate and combination pattern, and the results were presented in tables (see the Results Section) to provide an overview of the linguistic composition of the signage in the Dadou Road Historic Block.

For code preference, the arrangement and distribution of different languages on bilingual and multilingual signs were investigated, through which the hierarchical relationship among different languages were displayed and thus inferring the current status of each language in the social context. Factors considered include vertical or horizontal alignment of languages, centering versus marginal positioning, as well as font size, style and color. The findings were summarized with representative example photographs to illustrate the patterns observed. For emplacement, the appropriateness of each sign's location was examined in relation to its intended function and the sociocultural features of the space. To be more specific, whether the signs were strategically placed to effectively convey their messages and align with the historical and cultural context of Dadou Road Historic Block were examined, considering factors such as visibility, accessibility, and harmony with surrounding environment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Language choice (RQ1)

Language choice refers to the languages that sign creators choose to display on signs, which mainly involves three aspects of information: language type, number of languages, and language combination patterns. Language type refers to the various languages appearing on the signs; the number of languages refers to the total count of different languages appearing in one unit of analysis, according to which signs can be classified into monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual (involving three or more languages) categories. Language combination patterns refer to the collocation mode of different languages (or symbols) appearing on the signs, which can be a pure Chinese character mode, such as “朱仁民艺术馆 (Zhu Renmin Art Museum)”, or a bilingual or multilingual collocation mode, such as “出口 | EXIT” and “白夜 | La Blancher | BISTRO & WINE.”

4.1.1. Language Types

As shown in **Table 1**, Dadou Road Historic Block mainly featured eight languages: Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, French, Dutch, Italian, and Sanskrit. Among these, Chinese appeared most frequently, accounting for a high proportion of 96.8%. English comes second, with a proportion of 34.1%. Japanese, Korean, and French appear with similar frequencies, with the first two appearing 30 times each (4.4%) and the latter appearing 27 times (4.0%). Dutch appears three times, while Italian and Sanskrit each appear only once. The researchers also found 12 non-linguistic signs, most of which are official traffic signs, such as “人形横道 (pedestrian crossing),” “禁止驶入 (no entry),” and “禁止鸣喇叭 (no honking)” signs, mainly appearing on peripheral roads and some important traffic sections within the area. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that among the

Table 1. Linguistic landscape of Dadou Road Historic Block: language types.

Language Type	Total (N = 678)		Official (N = 343)		Private (N = 335)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Chinese	639	96.8	332	96.8	307	91.6
English	251	34.1	117	34.1	134	40.0
Japanese	30	4.4	30	8.7	0	0
Korean	30	4.4	30	8.7	0	0
French	27	4.0	22	6.4	5	1.5
Dutch	3	0.4	0	0	3	0.9
Italian	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.3
Sanskrit	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.3
Non-linguistic	12	1.8	11	3.2	1	0.3

Chinese signage data, there are seven signs with partial text annotated in Pinyin for Hangzhou dialect (belonging to the Hangzhou sub-dialect of the Taihu dialect of Wu language).

Out of the total 678 linguistic landscape data items, there are 343 official signs and 335 private signs, roughly equal in number. The frequency and proportion of Chinese and English appearing in the above two types of signs differ slightly. In official signs, Chinese accounts for 96.8%, slightly higher than the proportion of English (91.6%), while in private signs, the proportion of English (40.0%) is higher than that of Chinese (34.1%). Japanese and Korean only appear in official signs, which are explanatory signs for scenic spots, road guidance, or safety warning signs set up by the authorities in the street. French appears 22 times and 5 times in official and private signs, respectively. However, it should be pointed out that the French content on the official signs is the same, all being “patrimoine mondial,” meaning “世界遗产 (world heritage),” appearing in a UNESCO World Heritage Committee logo on the signs, indicating the cultural value and significance of the historic block. Dutch, Italian, and Sanskrit only appear in private signs, and their specific locations will be mentioned later in the text.

4.1.2. Number and Combination Patterns of Languages

The number of languages refers to the total number of different languages displayed on a single sign, while the language combination patterns refer to the ways in which the languages are used together. As shown in **Table 2**, the number of monolingual signs accounts for 64.4% of the total number of signs, with the vast majority being Chinese monolingual signs, accounting for 60.8% of the total. In other words, one out of every two signs that appear in this historic block is a Chinese monolingual sign. This proportion is also reflected in official (62.7%) and private (58.8%) signs, and all monolingual signs in official settings are Chinese signs, with no other languages appearing. Among private monolingual

Table 2. Linguistic landscape of Dadou Road Historic Block: number and combination of languages.

Number and Combination of Languages	Total (N = 678)		Official (N = 343)		Private (N = 335)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Chinese	412	60.8	215	62.7	197	58.8
English	23	3.4	0	0	23	6.9
French	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.3
Sanskrit	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.3
Total (Monolingual)	437	64.4	215	62.7	222	66.3
Chinese, English	190	28.0	86	25.1	104	31.0
Chinese, French	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.3
English, French	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.3
English, Italian	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.3
Total (Bilingual)	193	28.3	86	25.1	107	31.9
Chinese, English, French	3	0.4	1	0.3	2	0.6
Chinese, English, Dutch	3	0.4	0	0	3	0.9
Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean	9	1.3	9	2.6	0	0
Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, French	21	3.1	21	6.1	0	0
Total (Multilingual)	36	5.2	31	9.0	5	1.5
Non-linguistic	12	1.8	11	3.2	1	0.3
Total	678	100	343	100	335	100

signs, there are 23 English signs, accounting for 6.9% of the total number of private signs; one French sign, appearing on a parasol placed in the outdoor leisure area of a Western-style pastry shop, with the French text being “MOET & CHANDON,” which is a French champagne brand name; and one Sanskrit sign, appearing on a “Ten States of Subjugation” diagram posted on the storefront of a craft shop. This diagram is a common pattern in Tibetan Buddhism, consisting of three graphics and seven Sanskrit letters, and is considered a mysterious and powerful symbol.

Bilingual signs account for more than a quarter of the total, reaching 28.3%, with almost all bilingual signs featuring a combination of Chinese and English. The proportion of Chinese-English bilingual signs appearing in the private commercial sector (31.0%) is greater than their proportion in the official sector (25.1%). Similar to the case of monolingual signs, bilingual signs in official settings only have one combination of Chinese and English. Other bilingual signs found in the survey are all private signs, with language combinations including Chinese and French, i.e., “白夜 | La Blancher,” which is the name of a Western restaurant; English and French, i.e., “Wine Uncle | CHÂTEAU Ballan-Larquette,” also appearing on the signboard of a Western restaurant, with “Wine Uncle” being the name of the restaurant and “CHÂTEAU Ballan-Larquette” being a red wine from the Ballan-Larquette winery in the Bordeaux region of France, ac-

ording to inquiries; and English and Italian, i.e., “DONNAFUGATA | Sicilia | Sicily,” appearing on the exterior wall of a Western restaurant, with “DONNAFUGATA” being the name of the winery and “Sicilia” and “Sicily” being the Italian and English names, respectively, for the island of Sicily in southern Italy.

Multilingual signs account for the smallest proportion, at only 5.2% of the total, with more than 80% (N = 31) being scenic spot explanatory signs, road guidance signs, or safety warning signs set up by the government in the block, mainly featuring four languages: Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean. Although French also appears 22 times, as mentioned earlier, the content is the same. There are also two Chinese-English-French and three Chinese-English-Dutch trilingual signs among the private signs, with one Chinese-English-French sign appearing on the signboard of a Western restaurant as its name, and the remaining four signs all appearing at a fixed stall selling tea and beverages, where the vendor places several brands of beer from Belgium and France in a prominent position on the stall, serving a certain informational purpose.

4.2. Code Preference (RQ2)

Code preference refers to the arrangement and distribution of various languages on bilingual or multilingual signs, reflecting the priority relationship between them and thus determining the actual status of different languages in the social environment. Scollon & Scollon (2003) pointed out that when multiple codes are arranged vertically, the dominant code is often placed above the subordinate code; when arranged horizontally, the dominant code usually appears to the left of the subordinate code (for languages written from right to left, such as Arabic, the dominant code may appear to the right of the subordinate code); when distributed in other forms, the dominant code is generally placed in the center, while the subordinate code is distributed along the edges. In addition, the size, shape, and color of the font can also reflect the priority relationship between codes. For example, Figure 1 shows an officially established bilingual sign, with Chinese characters and English arranged horizontally (the writing direction of each language is from top to bottom). Although English is on the left side of the Chinese characters, occupying the dominant code position, the font of the Chinese characters is obviously larger and bolder, and occupies the central position of the sign, so Chinese is the actual dominant code on this sign.

In almost all of the official signs collected in this study, Chinese is placed in the prioritized position on the sign, either above or to the left of other languages, with a larger font size and the most prominent appearance. For example, in the scenic spot explanation sign shown in Figure 2, the four-language names of the site in Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean are located in the upper right corner. The Chinese name “国家厂丝仓库旧址” appears at the top with the largest font size. Below the Chinese name, the English, Korean, and Japanese names are arranged in order from top to bottom and left to right, with relatively



Figure 1. A sign for the “The Grand Canal Fortune Town”.



Figure 2. An introduction board for the “Former Site of the State Silk Warehouse”.

smaller font sizes. Below the site names are introductory texts, with the Chinese introduction at the top, followed by English, Korean, and Japanese introductions from top to bottom. In only three instances on official signs, Chinese characters do not appear in the dominant code position. One of them is a “UnionPay” logo

posted at the entrance of a store, with the English word “UnionPay” appearing above the Chinese characters “银联”. The other two instances appear on a boundary stone marking the heritage area (see **Figure 3**) and on the body of a machine at an emergency assistance point (**Figure 4**). However, unlike other landscape data, the data presented in these two areas appear simultaneously on different surfaces of a three-dimensional object, while all other data only appear on a single independent two-dimensional plane. Therefore, the dominant code positions mentioned above may not apply to these two areas.



Figure 3. A boundary stone marking the heritage area.



Figure 4. An emergency call box.

Similar to the language distribution and arrangement on official signs, in the vast majority of private signs, Chinese characters are also placed in the prioritized code position. On some signs where Chinese characters are not in the prioritized position, they are often larger and bolder than other languages, reflecting their actual dominant status. However, researchers also found that some private signs (9 instances), when presenting multiple codes, especially Chinese and English, adopt an arrangement with English on top and Chinese characters below, without enlarging or bolding the Chinese characters, and some signs even have more prominent English fonts. As shown in **Figure 5**, this sign appears in front of a hotel's street-side bar. The text inside the black rectangle indicates the hotel's name, with the English proper name "CHEERY" in the largest font size and in the center position, followed by a slightly smaller row of English common names "HOTEL & RESORTS" below, and the Chinese name "杭州运河祈利酒店" at the bottom. The codes inside the white circle also adopt a distribution form with the English name "buddha bar" on top and the Chinese name "菩提酒吧" below.

4.3. Emplacement (RQ3)

Emplacement refers to the act of the sign creator setting up the sign in a specific location, with the purpose of evoking specific meanings of the sign and constructing its connection with the surrounding environment, which is a fundamental issue in geosemiotic research. **Scollon & Scollon (2003)** believe that the most important issue to focus on in emplacement practices is whether the placement of the sign conforms to the socio-cultural characteristics of the space



Figure 5. A rust-coloured metal sculpture with the logos of the "Cheery Hotels & Resorts" and the "Buddha Bar".

in which it is located. Accordingly, signs (semiotics) can be divided into three types. The first type is universalized semiotics, which refers to linguistic and textual signs that remain consistent in form when appearing in any scene. For example, trademarks, whether appearing in cities or villages, domestically or abroad, as long as they belong to the same company's products, the graphics or text in the logo remain unchanged (unless redesigned). The second type is transgressive semiotics, which refers to sign forms that do not conform to the environment in which they are located, such as illegal graffiti on public facilities, text on discarded food packaging bags on sidewalks, one-way signs on a two-way road, etc. The last type is situated semiotics, which refers to sign forms that function properly in appropriate scenes, such as correctly placed road traffic signs, store signs, etc. The creators of such signs successfully complete the activation of the sign's meaning and the connection between the sign and the scene.

The official signs recorded in this study include road signs and traffic signs, mainly distributed on the peripheral roads (waterways) of the historic block and some important traffic sections within the area; door signs, government agency (state-owned enterprise) name signs, and honor medals, usually placed at the entrance of buildings within the block; propaganda slogans, mostly appearing on the exterior walls of buildings or fences of residential communities, and scattered in various corners of the street; scenic spot explanation signs, safety reminder signs, and road signs, mainly appearing in scenic spots, commercial areas, and other crowded areas within the block. The placement of the above signs activates the meaning of the signs and enables them to perform their preset functions; only a few propaganda slogans are slightly out of place with their surrounding scenes, such as the slogan "Protecting minors is protecting our future" appearing in the roadside green space (lawn). The linguistic and textual forms on official signs are almost all simplified Chinese characters, with traditional characters only appearing on a few historical buildings or antique-style buildings, such as "香積寺" and "香積古埠". These texts all adopt a right-to-left writing method, such as the text "區街史歷路兜大" on the antique-style archway (resembling a pailou, with dougong and roof) at the entrance of the block.

The language data in private linguistic landscapes mainly appear on signs of various shops, exterior walls of buildings, glass doors (windows) near the entrance, or other prominent locations. Similar to the placement of official signs, most private signs are set up in relatively reasonable locations, and the meaning of the signs is successfully activated, completing a two-way connection with the surrounding environment. For example, the "推 | push" sign posted on the door at the entrance of a store, the presence of the door activates the meaning of the sign, while the sign also reinforces the existence of the door, and finally conveys information to people through the connection, based on which people complete a series of actions. A few signs are not very harmonious with their surrounding environment, such as the advertisement sign appearing on the exterior wall of an antique-style building in **Figure 6**, which has little meaningful connection with



Figure 6. Advertisements on the exterior of a building.

the scene. Although it plays the role of advertising and is one of the common advertising placement locations nowadays, it has the potential to damage the overall aesthetic of the building and weaken the cultural capital of the district. It is worth noting that among the 78 shops involved in this study, 32 shop signs use traditional characters, accounting for more than 40%. In addition, among these shop signs, 17 adopt a right-to-left writing method. As shown in **Figure 7**, most of these signs use wooden plaques, and the fonts mostly adopt various handwritten or artistic styles.

Overall, Dadou Road Historic Block presents a linguistic ecological environment characterized by “Chinese dominance, multilingual coexistence.” Chinese is the dominant language, occupying the dominant code position on the vast majority of signs, which is consistent with its official language status. English appears on more than 30% (34.1%) of the signs, and its position on bilingual and multilingual signs is second only to Chinese, reflecting the influence of English as an international lingua franca. Among other languages, Japanese and Korean are the most common foreign languages besides English (Japanese and Korean appear in pairs on signs, sometimes with Japanese first, sometimes with Korean first), all appearing on scenic spot explanation signs, road signs, and safety reminder signs within the block. This part of the results is consistent with the research findings of other researchers (Shan & Liu, 2016; Qiu, 2016) in similar scenarios. After consulting the Hangzhou Statistical Yearbook 2020, the researchers found that in 2019, Hangzhou City received a total of 1,133,143 overseas tourists, among which 111,195 and 62,631 were from South Korea and Japan, respectively, second only to 140,771 from the United States, making them



Figure 7. Chinese characters written on a black sign above the doorway.

the second and third largest source countries of foreign tourists in Hangzhou. These data explain to a certain extent the reason for the appearance of English, Japanese, and Korean on the signs in the block, and also reflect the important role played by business activities in the construction of linguistic landscapes in tourism fields.

In addition, judging from the survey results, the multilingual signs in Dadou Road Historic Block are mainly some officially established explanation and guidance signs, only set up in some important historical sites and traffic locations, with relatively limited multilingual service capabilities and relatively simple forms. Although many multilingual signs in the district have QR codes that can lead to the WeChat official account of “Grand Canal Hangzhou Scenic Area,” the content is still mainly aimed at serving domestic audiences. The foreign languages on private signs are almost all English, once again reflecting the strong global influence of English. However, the number of signs containing Japanese or Korean is zero, which does not match the situation of potential foreign tourist source countries. The multilingual signage on Dadou Road Historic Block demonstrates the efforts made by the local government to develop a welcoming environment for foreign visitors and to establish an international tourist destination. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of the diversity, distribution and presentation of multilingual services. To better showcase the unique charm of this historic block and enhance visitors’ travel experiences, relevant authorities could consider adding more multilingual signs with richer content at key locations, as well as exploring innovative forms of multilingual services, such as providing audio guides or interactive displays. By optimizing

the linguistic landscape, Dadou Road Historic Block can further strengthen its cultural appeal, foster cross-cultural communication, and contribute to the sustainable development of tourism along the Grand Canal.

Furthermore, the construction of the linguistic landscape in Dadou Road Historic Block needs to consider the issue of “re-historicization.” The protection and development of urban historical and cultural areas require not only the preservation of tangible material resources such as historical buildings and cultural relics but also the full utilization of the linguistic landscape as a media means to inherit and promote regional history and culture. This study found that approximately 40% of the shop signs in Dadou Road Historic Block use traditional Chinese characters, including writing from right to left. These linguistic and textual forms complement the historical atmosphere of the district, enhancing the sense of cultural identity and belonging. At the same time, the appropriate introduction of foreign language signs is conducive to creating an international atmosphere and enhancing the commercial and cultural taste of the district. However, it is also important to be cautious of the potential “de-historicization” risk brought about by the excessive use of foreign languages, which may weaken or even sever the connection between the block and local traditional culture. Therefore, the construction of the linguistic landscape in Dadou Road Historic Block should follow national and local language policies and norms, and be comprehensively planned, adhering to the principle of combining the ancient and the modern, and accommodating both Chinese and foreign elements. While inheriting and protecting historical and cultural heritage, it should also promote the sustainable development of tourism and achieve a win-win situation in social, economic, and cultural benefits.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the linguistic landscape of Dadou Road Historic Block along the Grand Canal in Hangzhou by analyzing 678 photographs of signs surveyed there. The study found that Chinese is widely used as the dominant language in this area, establishing its linguistic dominance, while English, Japanese, and Korean are the three main foreign languages used in the signs. The presence of non-Chinese languages can be attributed to Dadou Road Historic Block being both a famous tourist destination and an area highly influenced by globalization, as well as the makeup of foreign tourist sources in Hangzhou favoring East Asian countries. To achieve sustainable development in both tourism and cultural heritage protection, the study suggests that the construction of the linguistic landscape in Dadou Road Historic Block should follow national and local language policies, be well-planned, and adhere to the principle of combining the ancient and the modern while accommodating both Chinese and foreign elements. By optimizing the linguistic landscape, the district can strengthen its cultural appeal, foster cross-cultural communication, and contribute to the overall success of the Grand Canal tourism development.

Based on the data and results discussed in this study, several suggestions for future research can be proposed. First, comparative studies of the linguistic landscapes in other historic blocks of cultural heritage sites along the Canal could be conducted. This would offer a more thorough comprehension of how social environments may affect language use in public areas. Second, future research may utilise more diverse methodologies, including ethnographic interviews with sign creators, business owners, and visitors, to gain deeper insights into the motives, perceptions, and experiences associated with the linguistic environment. Last, longitudinal studies may also be conducted to track and document changes of the linguistic landscape over time, investigating how language use varies and evolves responding to shifting political, economic, and cultural circumstances.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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