



Secrets Hidden on Commercial Signs: A Case Study of Chinese Restaurant Fronts in Prague

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introduction

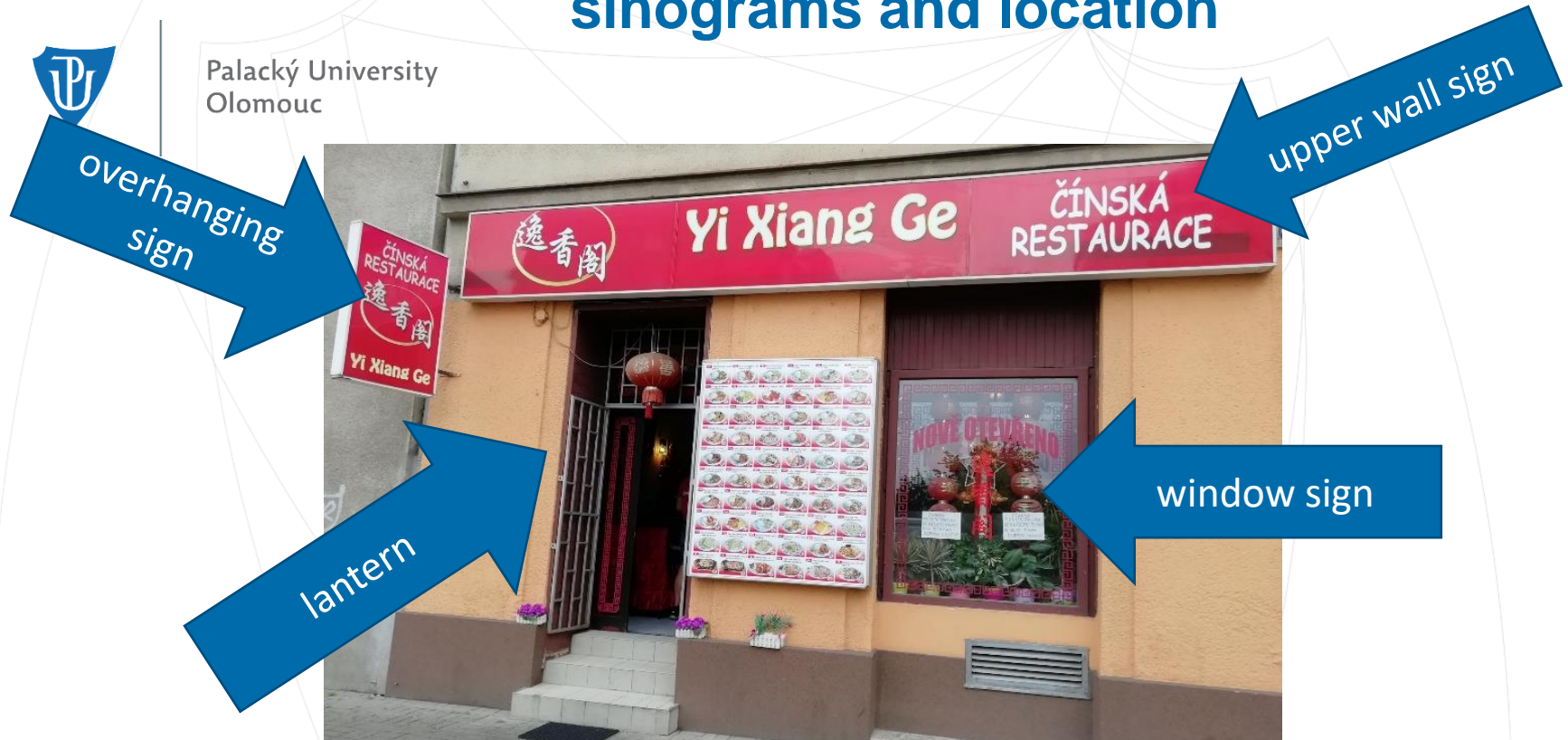
- previous research: naming practices of Chinese restaurants in Prague (155 restaurants, August 2020)
 - outdoor signage is characterized by language and script plurality: multilingual combinations (code mixing, cf. Huebner, 2009) of the generic and specific part, e.g., Čínská restaurace Jin Man Lou 金满楼
- an extensive use of sinograms on restaurant fronts as an interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon
 - ethnically and linguistically homogenous Czechia
 - Chinese community in Prague/ Czechia: small and young in age (Sluka et al., 2018); geographically dispersed, and not very communal (Horálek et al., 2017)
 - sinograms in Czech public space
- goal: to describe the status of sinograms on the Chinese restaurant fronts
 - signs that were located on the restaurant fronts and exposed to a public (street) view (i.e., 16 restaurants in shopping centers, buildings and underground passages not included)



Chinese restaurant fronts and linguistic landscape

- one specific segment of the LL
 - (initial) classification by Barni & Barga (2009) → **external** position; location: central and peripheral **urban areas**; domain: **public**; subcategory: **catering**
- restaurant signs = icons of a commercial establishment
 - highly competitive environment
 - two basic principles that structure LL (Ben-Rafael, 2009):
 - “**presentation-of-self**” and “**good-reasons**”
- language choice
 - Spolsky (2009) defines three conditions: 1) language you know; 2) language which can be read by the people you expect to read it; 3) your own language or a language with which you wish to be identified
 - advertising: demonstrates the fine interplay of “presumed reader’s condition” and “**symbolic value condition**” (Spolsky, 2009)
 - “impersonal multilingualism” (Edelman, 2009), “metaphorical code-switching” (Hult, 2009)

sinograms and location



1. upper wall signs
2. overhanging signs
3. window signs
4. other big-size signs
5. Chinese entrance gates
6. menus:
 - dishes or their types/ restaurant name
7. smaller Chinese artefacts: lanterns, statues, vases, knot decorations
8. business statement on the door



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sinograms and location

Chinese
entrance gate



menu



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number of signs with sinograms

- items visible from a street vantage point
 - upper wall signs, overhanging signs, window signs, gate signs, other big-size signs

one	31	wall sign	12
		overhanging sign	13
		other	6
two	49	wall + overhanging sign	27
		wall + window sign	5
		two wall signs	8
		other	9
three +	40	wall + overhanging sign + xxx	20
		other	20

120 (139)
over 85%

- two perspectives: **information arrangement + graphic design**



sinograms and information arrangement

– 4 types of information

1. restaurant name (111)
2. (only as) a part of logo (3)
3. description (8)
4. wish (5)



中式佳肴
家的味道



- to what extent is the information provided in sinograms transmitted in Czech? or at least in English?



1. restaurant names

- specific term (53), specific & generic term (50+8)

a. GENERIC TERM

饭店 (36), 酒家 (7), 酒店 (5), 酒楼 (3), 快餐 (4), 食府 (1), 美食 (2)	Czech equivalent	49	+ attribute <i>čínský</i>	46
			without	3
	English equivalent (only)	8	+ attribute <i>Chinese</i> or <i>China</i>	5
			without	3
	no generic term			1

(generics with attribute „Chinese“ in Czech/ English occur also in restaurant names without the generic term in sinograms)



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b. SPECIFIC TERM

Tian Jin 天津
New Peking 新北京
S'chuan 四川

Pinyin	67		
Czech	15	fully identical	6
		partly identical	9
English	7	fully identical	3
		partly identical	4
Proper name	17	Pinyin	13
		translated constituent	2
		other	2

Fu Da
福达

Leknín 莲花
(‘lotus flower’)

Moon 明月楼
(‘bright’ + ‘moon’
+ ‘building’)



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Transmitted ideas

plant motifs (8)

garden (4+1)

nice smell, pearl,
happiness, harmony

“Hidden Secrets”

places with a certain ambiance:

- ‘garden’ 园, ‘building’ 楼, ‘pavilion’ 阁: *Hui Bin Ge* 会宾阁 (‘meet’ + ‘guest’ + ‘pavilion’)
- ‘home, house, family’ 家: *Jia Jia Fu* 家家福 (2x 家 + ‘happiness’)

precious things: *Jin Yu Lou* 金玉楼 (‘gold’ + ‘jade’ + ‘building’)

positive expectations:

- pleasure, joy 乐: *Jia Le Yuan* 家乐园 (‘home’ + ‘pleasure’ + ‘garden’)
- happiness, good fortune: *Ke Lai Fu* 客来福 (‘guest’ + ‘come’ + ‘happiness’)
- prosperity, abundance, wealth: *Jin Xin* 金鑫 (‘gold’ + ‘prosperity’), *Ding Feng* 鼎丰 (‘tripod’ + ‘plentiful’), *Cai Shen* 财神 (‘god of wealth’),
- other: *Mei Xin* 美心 (‘beautiful’ + ‘heart’), *Li De* 利德 (‘benefit’ + ‘virtue’)



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sinograms and graphic design

- spatial organization
 - upper wall signs
 - vertical writing
- colour choices
- styles of Chinese writing

WALL SIGNS LAYOUT

- part of logo (12)
- horizontal layout (38)
- vertical layout (25)
 - other (8)



part of logo



WALL SIGNS LAYOUT

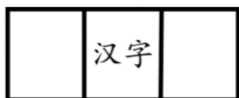
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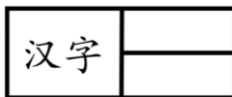
H1-a



H1-b

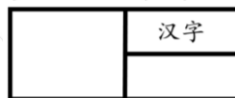


H2-a



or left-right reversed

H2-b



or left-right reversed



WALL SIGNS LAYOUT

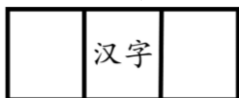
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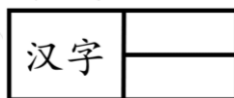
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H1-b

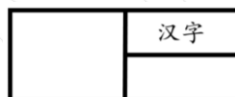


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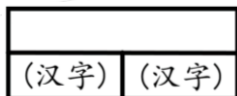
H2-b



or left-right reversed



V1



WALL SIGNS LAYOUT

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- vertical layout (25)
 - other (8)



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vertical writing

overhanging signs (71):

18 signs with vertical writing
centre (14), right side (4)

window signs (26):

8 restaurants with vertical
window writing

repeated on more windows

gate signs (7)

one couplet 对联 (a pair of lines
of poetry)



colour choices

- sinograms: yellow (orange), white or red
- combinations: red + yellow and/or white
- background: red
- window: red sinograms



styles of Chinese writing

- almost 60% semi-cursive script 行书
- over 30% regular script 楷书
- clerical script (1), seal script (3)
- traditional sinograms (8); both (4)



conclusion

- **sinograms and structuration principles**
 - “presentation-of-self”: a very effective signal that attracts attention and, at first glance, sets the restaurant in contrast with surrounding establishments (! geographic dispersion of restaurants)
 - “good-reasons”: popularity of sinograms, occurrence on multiple signs, layout patterns, colours with positive connotations (+ menus, symbolic artifacts)
- **sinograms as a language choice: “symbolic-value condition”**
 - limited transmission of information
 - often easily visible and eye-catching (about 85% of restaurants)
 - decorative style of writing, “Chinese” colours
- **a set of aspects how sinograms contribute to shaping the situation**
 - part of the signature: restaurant specializes in ethnic Chinese food



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Photo documentation: Michaela Frydrychová, Terezie Kadlecová (students at the Department of Asian studies, involved in the faculty project IGA2020)



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Thank you for your attention.

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