

Title: Navigating the Semiotic Landscape of Cha Chaan Teng: An Auto-Ethnographic Account of a Local-Global Nexus in Hong Kong

Also known as Hong Kong-style cafés, Cha Chaan Teng (茶餐廳; hereinafter abbreviated as CCT) prospered in the 1950s as an affordable alternative to high-end European restaurants. As a space of ambivalence that fuses nostalgic belonging with cosmopolitan longing, CCT forms a fascinating site for probing the competing influences of localization and globalization. Through an auto-ethnographically oriented linguistic landscape approach, this experiential study adopts a self-reflexive angle by positioning the researcher as the participant, and examines how different semiotic resources are mobilized to spatialize contesting local and global discourses in CCT. With reference to Jaworski and Thurlow's (2010) framework of semiotic landscape, a total of 174 photographs are documented in four selected CCT in Hong Kong Island. Their emplaced signs are analyzed not only in terms of written language, but in tandem with other discursive modalities relevant to the retail experience, including visual images, iconography, and architecture. Findings of the fieldwork data reveal CCT's position as a fluid 'third space' where various "scales" (Blommaert, 2015) interact and shift on a local-global continuum. This offers a new perspective on CCT as a multilayered microcosm of the city, where varying indexical meanings, temporal frames, identities, sensibilities and affective responses intersect and co-exist. Further, the illustrative material of my study points to an increasing alignment of CCT with global orientations and neoliberal ideologies, as exemplified by how elements of retro and nostalgia are marketed as 'authentic' and commodified into cultural symbols 'for sale' in the "symbolic economy" (Zukin, 1995). I conclude by illuminating CCT's role as a cultural intermediary between the preservation of cultural roots and pursuits of commercial modernity, and by extension, highlighting the ever-evolving dynamics of foodscapes in the contemporary era.