THE RED WOK: A VISUAL ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN CHINATOWN RESTAURANT SIGNAGE THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR GASTRONOMIC IDENTITY

Abstract:

Today's Chinatowns serve as a social gathering place that can help us in understanding its inhabitants' relationships with the host country. With food culture as a meaningful aspect of the Chinese experience, this research analyzes the capacity of signage as a communicative device that punctuates our gastronomic expectations and experience. John Bower's (1999) theory of design is used to analyze 65 Chinatown restaurant signage to discover the essence of European Chinatown restaurant signage that contributes to their gastronomic identity. By delving into the design attributes that contribute to the appearance and types of the signage, observable patterns can be established to suggest the gastronomic visual identity of restaurants found in Milan, Italy; Vienna, Austria; Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Antwerp, Belgium; and Paris, France. The data suggested that there are three major essences that evoke the unique Chinese attributes in signage: i) persistent and overwhelming applications of Chinese attributes in naming; ii) a universal preference for the red color, and iii) application of design elements with cultural attributes, calligraphic type styles, and architectural characteristics.

Introduction

We can find Chinatowns in many parts of the world and they are usually known for being a tourist attraction for domestic and international visitors. What looks like an unassimilated foreign community is also home to dozens of Chinese restaurants, groceries, pharmacies, and associations. Today's Chinatowns serve as a social gathering place that can help us in understanding its inhabitants' relationships with the host country. For many of its citizens, Chinatown is not just a place of dwelling and productivity but it is also a place of cultural significance (Kwong, 1996). In addition to be known as a district in which the population is predominantly of Chinese origin or other Asian descents, Chinatowns are known for their abundance of restaurants. A restaurant is a physical entity bounded by location, knowledge, investment, and human resources. Depending on the location or types of food served, a restaurant's signage plays a small but important part. It is an affordable means of advertising as its principal function is to enable consumers to easily identify the name and location of the business it represents. This research investigates the design attributes of restaurant signage in European Chinatowns in order to suggest the evocative essence or qualities that contribute to its gastronomic identity. By delving into the design choices that contribute to the appearance of the signage, observable patterns can be established to suggest the gastronomic visual identity of these Chinatowns.

In a larger context, signage is part and parcel of an enclave's identity. The signage, as a visual marker of an enterprise, can broaden our understanding of a group's historical background and identity. During a restaurant's start-up and expansion phases, access to family labor is essential (Fock, 1998, 93; Redding, 1991). According to several studies, most small to medium-sized Chinese restaurants worldwide today are family-owned and operated (Antolin, 1998; Pieke and Benton, 1998; Gütinger, 1998; Ling, 2002; Look Lai, 1998; Parker, 1998; Teixeira, 1998; Thunø, 1998; Wong, 1988, 1998). However, these restaurants may also employ other Chinese immigrants (Watson, 1975). A practice that can be traced back to a series of famine, peasant uprisings, and rebellions that unfolded during the mid-1840s of Imperial China, millions of Chinese left their home country to become cheap unskilled workers. In the United States of America, during the economic development of the western frontier, thousands of Chinese were recruited

as a source of labor, assisting in the building of railroads that span the continent today. There are approximately 46 million ethnic Chinese who now live outside China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan (Liu, H. & van Dongen, 2013). When the Chinese settled in San Francisco in 1850, Mayor John W. Geary welcomed them by holding a public ceremony at Portsmouth Square, the then-center of the city (Choy, 2008). However, in reacting to the rising anti-Chinese sentiment, the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed by the federal government into law in 1882, lasting until 1943, making it a non-wartime federal law which excluded a community based on nationality. Unfortunately, during the pandemic of COVID-19, we witnessed the rise of xenophobia, rearing its ugly head which resulted in various assaults on ethnic Chinese as well as other Asians (Gover, Harper and Langton, 2020).

George Weightman (1985) suggested that despite racial discriminations, repressive legislative measures, massacres, expulsions, and forced assimilation, Chinatowns have always been able to adapt and perpetuate itself. With the lures of cultural experiences and some bargains, Chinatowns offer authentic cuisines such as Hakka, Szechuan, and Shanghai cuisines. Cantonese seafood restaurants are distinguishable by their dining room layout and ornate interior designs. They typically offer pricey seafood such as lobsters crabs, clams, prawns, oysters and fish, which are kept alive in fish tanks until it is time to prepare the meal. Budget-friendly type of food can be found in Chinese barbeque deli restaurants. Typically, roasted ducks, chicken and suckling pigs can be seen hanging in the window. The décor is unassuming and the food is more reasonably priced for a handful selections of noodles, fried rice, porridge or congee. As a medium for communication, a signage's existential purpose is to bring patrons into the restaurant. With food culture as a meaningful aspect of the Chinese experience, this research analyzes the capacity of signage as a communicative device that punctuates our gastronomic expectations and experience.

2. Theoretical Framework
The study is a continuation of a similar study that started in 2015 in San Francisco's Chinatown restaurant where 69 signage were surveyed. It was expanded to include another 86 restaurants in Southeast Asia in countries like Singapore, Philippines, Laos, Malaysia, and Thailand. When the study was concluded due to complications associated with the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, a total of 65 restaurants in six European cities were surveyed, for a total of 220 restaurants. The theoretical framework for this research is based on two preceding research projects conducted in San Francisco, California and five other Southeast Asia Chinatowns. For this paper, which focuses on European Chinatowns, information for 65 Chinese restaurant signage are collected. These restaurants are located in the following cities and countries: Milan, Italy (n=15), Vienna, Austria, (n=10), Amsterdam, The Netherlands (n=14), Antwerp, Belgium (n=11), and Paris, France (n=15). To qualify, the selected restaurants must sell the following type of foods singularly or in combinations of Chinese/Asian dishes, vegetarian, dim sum, dessert, cafes, bakery, and seafood. Data in the form of photo documentation were recorded by using a DSLR (digital single-lens reflect) camera with a zoom lens, with a 32-gigabyte SDHC flash card.

In general, three types of signboard are identified: storefront, pedestrian, and awning. For this research, all restaurant signage must focus on marketing or advertising its message by prioritizing its name and (if any) other secondary or tertiary components such as logos, and (if any) descriptions of its nature of business or contact information. 'Storefront signage' is characterized by the visual content when placed on a restaurant's façade and is considered a primary sign. A pedestrian signage is secondary and its distinctive purpose is to project itself outward from sideways for pedestrians to notice. Awnings, on the other hand, are made from fabric pulled over a metal framework (Robson, 2011).

All restaurants surveyed must at least maintain professionally crafted signboards that are positioned above street levels. Since 'signage' refers to a collective group of signs, the word 'signage' will be used to indicate for both singular and plural nouns. Any reference to the word 'character' is reserved for Chinese

characters while other references such as 'letter', 'alphabet' or 'script' are for non-Chinese language. The definition of 'foreign language' applies to the non-Chinese language found on the signage. 'Component(s) and 'element(s) are used interchangeably to describe the items found on the signage. 'Type style' refers to a specific style of type. John Bower's (1999) theory of design elements, consisting of three sets of framework (components, characteristics of the components, and the interactions of the components) is adapted to answer the research question, "What are the essence of European Chinatown restaurant signage that contribute to their gastronomic identity?" as shown in figure 1.
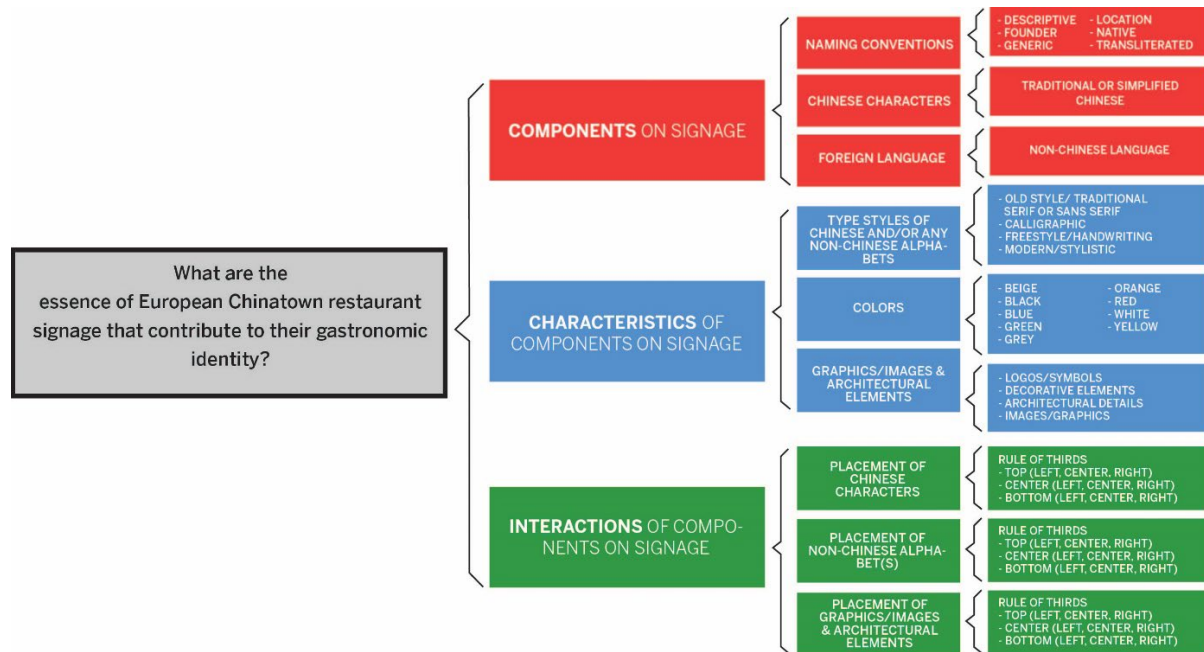

Figure 1: The research question and framework adapted from John Bower's theory of design elements.

2.1. Components on signage
In the components on signage, there are three categories, consisting of naming conventions, Chinese characters and foreign language. There are six naming conventions used to identify the restaurant names:

- Descriptive: Signage that includes English and any other foreign language other than Chinese that describes the type of food the restaurant serves.
- Founder: Signage with restaurant names derived from an actual or imaginary, or one that is physiologically descriptive of a supposed founder, cook, chef, or owner.
- Generic: Signage with restaurant names based on initials, coined names, or generic-sounding.
- Location: Signage that are named after a physical, fictitious, or imaginary location such as 'Heaven,' for example, falls under this category.
- Native: Signage that features only one main language on its main signage.
- Transliterated: Signage with restaurant names that are based on Romanized Chinese which can be based on standard Mandarin or other Chinese dialects such as Cantonese, Shanghainese, or Teochew, just to name a few.

2.2 Characteristics of the components on signage

A type style is an additional format performed on a typeface to make it appear as bold, italic, shadow, and strike through. Type style classifications from Linotype is used to categorize both the Chinese characters and specifically, English/Roman letters into the following five categories: Old style/traditional serif, Old

style/traditional san serif, Calligraphic, Freestyle/handwriting and Modern/stylistic. Sans serif is identified as letterforms that do not have the small projecting features called "serifs" at the end of strokes. Examples include fonts like Helvetica, Arial, and Avant Garde. Old style/traditional sans serif type styles appear structured, traditional, and regal while its serif counterpart is more structured and formal. Calligraphic typestyles lack formal structure in appearance, as if written by a broad nib pen or a brush. This classification also applies to type styles that mimic the appearance of Chinese characters. Freestyle/handwriting type styles look casual mainly because of their handwritten appearance. Finally, modern/stylistic type styles are structured but yet they exude playfulness and are modernistic in appearance. When there are gradations used, the main color selected will be based on the in-between colors. When there are realistic/photographic images on the signage, the dominant color values from the subject matter will be used for coding purposes. For e.g. if a realistic picture of reddish bar-be-que pork is featured on a signage, the color red will be coded. Where gold accent is used, it is considered as yellow while chrome or silver accents/colors are treated as white or grey, depending on its color values.

2.3 Interactions of the components on signage

There are three categories in the interactions of components on signage: the placements of the Chinese characters, foreign language(s), and graphics/images and architectural characteristics. Any form of sponsored logos from manufacturers or distributors are excluded as they are irrelevant to the study. Every placement of items on the signboard such as the type styles, colors, logos, and images become data for 'interactions.' These interactions are influenced by their positions in three main areas of the signboard: top, center, and bottom of the signage. The rule of thirds, commonly employed in photography and cinematography, is employed by dividing the signboard into a grid which yields nine sections. These sections are top left, top center, top right, center left, center, center right, bottom left, bottom center, and bottom right, as shown in figure 2. At times, various components on the signage may 'flow' into another section. To provide a more accurate measurement, columns and rows are devised which further divide each one of the nine sections into smaller grids. For storefront signage, a 10-column x 5-row grid is used while for the pedestrian signage, a 5-column x 5-row grid is devised.
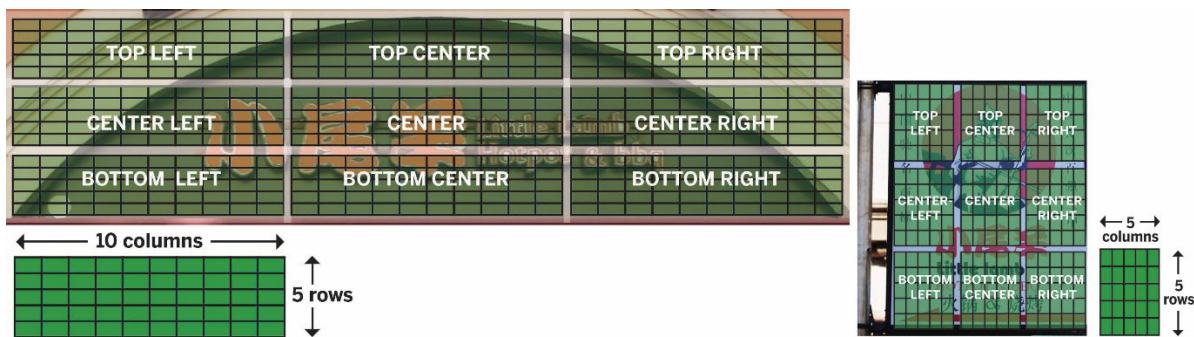

Figure 2. The rule of thirds as applied to the storefront and pedestrian signage. The nine sections for each signage are further divided into columns and rows.

3. Limitations of the study

The real reasons behind the design decision for the signage in this survey are indeterminable due to many factors that are included in this study. The research is more associated with the analysis towards the design choices made on the signage. Although this paper is mainly about deciphering the design elements on signage, it is important to establish that the intersection of history, geography, anthropology, and economics can come into play. Signage can be viewed from a limited number of angles which makes the

accuracy of visual analysis more challenging due to accessibility of the signage. The visual data collected is primarily based on what is observable on the façade of a building. The restaurants' interiors and printed materials such as menus and circulars are excluded from the study. Due to time constrains and the availability of travel funds, the data collected is only reserved to handful of cities. With only four restaurants sampled in Munich, Germany, the sampling size is not enough to provide a more comprehensive 'picture' for the city. There, the city of Munich is not included in the survey.

Furthermore, some of the restaurants are not necessarily located in a so-called Chinatown district or area. The unpredictability of the weather in the various cities surveyed has also posed logistical challenges. By the time funds are available to include more cities in Europe, the global pandemic made traveling impossible due to strict lockdowns and the ensuing xenophobia which added complications to the situation. Understandably, not all signage are created equal as they can come in different dimensions and shapes. In addition, this paper does not take into consideration the multidimensional perspective of atmospheric variables (e.g. scent, lighting, background music found inside the restaurant) but rather, it empirically documents content on the signage by using a conceptual framework that focuses on generic compositional principles, not necessarily one that is specific for signage. This paper is by no means conclusive as there are many other cities that are not included in the study due to the limitation of funding. Therefore, the outcome of this research is by no means comprehensive as it is a convenient sampling which takes into account the limited availability of Chinese or Asian communities that offer non-local food cuisines.

4. Findings
In this section, the components, their characteristics, and their interactions on the signage are discussed. Both storefront and pedestrian signage are ubiquitous in all six cities surveyed while the pedestrian signage, which typically is smaller in size, is at best, a supportive signboard to the main storefront signage.

4.1 Naming conventions
Before discussing the naming convention, it is important to provide a background about the written Chinese characters. To be exact, there are 106,230 Chinese characters in existence but only between three and four thousands are actually needed for regular use (Cerchiaro, 2019). When based on the standard Mandarin which carries the same pronunciation, the Chinese characters are divided into two groups of writing, Traditional Chinese (used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau) and Simplified Chinese (used in mainland China, Malaysia, and Singapore). This is because between 1955 and 1964, the central government of the People's Republic of China devised a new set of writing system which reduces the number of strokes to write in an effort to educate the illiterate masses (Bökset, 2006). Only around 40% of the most frequently used Chinese characters were simplified (Liu & Hsiao, 2012). Simplified Chinese characters can now be found in four out of six Chinatowns surveyed (refer to figure 3), except for Amsterdam and Paris where only traditional Chinese characters are used.

Figure 3. A comparison between a simplified (面) and a traditional Chinese (麵) character for 'noodle'. Interestingly, in traditional Chinese, the simplified character (面) used to denote 'noodle' actually means 'face' instead of 'noodle.'

Most names exude a positive idea, diligence, and promise. A restaurant called 'Da Jia Le' (大家樂) based in Antwerp means 'everyone is happy.' Some even exude traditional Chinese moral values such as 'Restaurant Heng Lay Chinois Vietnamien' in Paris. Its competitor, a restaurant called 'Heng Lay' (興來) carries the translated meaning of 'prosperity arriving.' 'Restaurant Traditionnel Ny Hav'(您好) in Paris uses the Chinese character, 您 (pinyin: nín), in an honorific second-person pronoun instead of the regular 你 (pinyin: ni) for its restaurant name in the form of a question, 'how are you?'. 您 is a polite form to show humbleness, used only when address the elderly or someone with seniority. With a name like 'Cooking Mr. Miao' in Milan, the name seems to refer to the physical traits of either a real person or an imaginary founder or owner. It is a rather playful or creative way in comparison to other naming conventions.

While 'Oriental City,' named in English for a restaurant in Amsterdam is generic, its Chinese name, stylized in traditional Chinese, carries an entirely different meaning. '海城'means 'Ocean City'. When named correctly, a restaurant can cleverly suggest the type of regional dishes it serves as well. For instance, a restaurant called 'China Restaurant Nanking' in Vienna suggest not only the country but also the city of Nanjing (alternatively Romanized as Nanking), the capital of Jiangsu province which is famous for its duck and goose dishes. 'China Si-Chuan Restaurant' in Amsterdam is another naming example where the location to indicate a country is hierarchically placed before the province. The dishes from Sichuan are popularly known for their hot and spicy flavor. 'Pockmarked Granny Bean Curd, otherwise better known as 'Mapo Tofu' (麻婆豆腐) is a spicy dish served in a chili and fermented bean sauce, often topped with minced meat of pork or beef.

The most preferred naming convention belongs to the location-based, at 50%, found in the restaurants surveyed in Vienna Austria. At 41%, the Milanese seem to prefer their Chinese restaurants to be descriptive. By descriptively naming their restaurants, they are able to succinctly explain the type of food or service they offer. 'Jubin Cinese Japan Thai,' 'Trattoria Cinese Long Chang' and 'Ristorante Cucina Cinese Da Zhong' just to name a few, are some examples. Founder-based naming convention is the least preferred method of naming. It is consistently ranked the lowest in all the Chinatown restaurants surveyed. Only in Milan where the founder-based naming convention is highly utilized, at 13%. In a host land where the Chinese language is deemed foreign, transliteration is a helpful linguistic tool for restaurants. Its ability to co-exist with other more dominant main languages further enhances these restaurants as 'exotic.' Transliterated names are rarely found in the cities surveyed but Antwerp holds the highest percentage, at 40%. A restaurant which sells hand-pulled noodles in Antwerp called 'Bai Wei' echoes its phonetic sound in Mandarin. However, 'Ting Kee' phonetically sounds more closely related to Cantonese pronunciations. Similarly, 'Wing Kee' in Amsterdam has a distinctively Cantonese-styled pronunciation as well. Both names are distinguishable by comparing the pronunciation of the restaurant's name to the standard Mandarin Chinese. Both cities, Milan and Amsterdam have almost 30% of transliterated restaurant names.

4.2 Non-Chinese language
Depending on the city, bilingual, trilingual, and quad-lingual signage co-exist with the Chinese language. In the restaurants surveyed in Milan, four out of the eleven (36%) restaurants feature English as their secondary language. One of the restaurants, 'Little Lamb' also features the Mongolian script as its specialty is bar-be-que mutton. Signage with English is also found in seven out of the nine restaurants in Vienna. Nine out of fourteen (64%) restaurants in Amsterdam also heavily rely on English as one of the main languages on their signage. In Antwerp, seven out of ten (70%) restaurants also feature English on their signage. The only city without the English language on its Chinese restaurant signage is Paris. 'Tang frères' (in Paris) features Burmese and Thai scripts in addition to Chinese characters on their storefront signage. Another restaurant named 'My Canh' has its Chinese name (美景) written as 'Beautiful

Scenery.' If written with the accent marks, Mỹ Cảnh,' is technically a Vietnamese name which also carries the same meaning. The restaurant also features French on its storefront signage 'Restaurant Chinois Vietnamien Thailandais.' Its pedestrian signage also has a mixture of quad-lingual scripts with an architectural motif that mimics Thailand's roof designs on its top.

4.3 Characteristics of the components on signage

The most popular type style for Chinese characters on both storefront and pedestrian signage is calligraphic, with as high as 93% for Paris. Stylistically, calligraphic type styles are cursive in appearance which is reminiscent of Chinese brushstrokes. It is an attempt to capture the essential character of Chinese characters. The second popular choice is a tie between the Old style/traditional and Freestyle/handwriting. While the former is structured, traditional, and regal in appearance, the latter is casual in appearance, as if written by hand. Traditionally-inspired type styles take cues from history, antiquity, and traditions. Old style letterforms remind us of Johannes Gutenberg's metal movable type printing press from 15th century Europe. Perhaps, the serifs' classic sense of structure and historical relevance are the reasons for their popularity. This kind of type styles appear orderly and seek to create a calm and orderly visual effect.

Figure 4. The Chinese character type styles for these two restaurants in Vienna contrast sharply as the Oldstyle/traditional serif (left) is more formal than the casual calligraphic style on the right.

Both the Old style/traditional serif and sans serif are popular choices for non-Chinese language on the signage. There is an equal preference between the Old style traditional serif and sans serif type styles for cities like Milan, Vienna, and Amsterdam while Antwerp and Paris seem to prefer sans serif over serif type styles. Sans serif type styles feature simple, clean lines that seem to espouse simplicity and the feeling of modernity. Regardless of preference, a few factors such as a type style's size, its appearance in different weight (light, heavy, wide, extra bold, or italic), to its colors and the background it contrasts with, are some important considerations for a signage's legibility.

The following are the commonly found colors on both the storefront and pedestrian signage. They are ranked in popularity: red, white, black, yellow, orange, blue, beige, green, and grey. White proved to be a popular color mostly due to its utilization as a background color. Red is another well-received background color. Since viewers may only have a few seconds to read the message, increasing the readability of the signage is paramount. On a bright and sunny day, or a dark and gloomy evening, a darkly colored background with lightly contrasted text or vice versa can ensure that all the important elements stand out for legibility.

Luckily, signage can also be lighted, making them even more indispensable in gloomy days. For that matter, colors carry a practical application on the signage. According to the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA), there are fifteen color combinations for lettering tested for readability at a distance (Winter, 2016). By OAAA's standard for legibility, together with four most commonly used signage colors from the survey (red, white, black, and yellow), there are seven possible combinations with the ranks indicated: i) black on yellow (ranked #1), ii) black on white (#2), iii) yellow on black (#3), iv) red on white (#12), v) yellow on red (#13), vi) red on yellow (#14) and vii) white on red (#15). The top three performers are restaurants in Amsterdam, Milan, and Paris for effectively applying black on yellow, black on white, and yellow on black on their signage.

4.4 Interactions of the components on signage

In this section, the specific placements of Chinese characters, non-Chinese alphabets, as well as any graphics/images and architectural elements are discussed. An organized signage can effectively communicate its message that can help first-time patrons to understand the type of food and service the restaurant offers. When they are inconsistent or cluttered, people become ill-informed or they get confused. By determining the most and least utilized nine sections on the signage, a snapshot of frequencies can suggest how the different elements are 'composed' on the signboard as shown in figure 5 for the placement of Chinese characters. Each city is color-coded and recorded in the nine sections for both signage formats. The heavily populated sections for storefront signage are in the center, top center, center right, top right, and top left. As for the pedestrian signage, the center and top center are also preferred, followed by top right, center left, and bottom center. Contrasting the rectangular format of most storefront signage, the heavily populated sections in pedestrian signage form what looked like a '+' sign. Such placements create a symmetrical balance on the signboard.
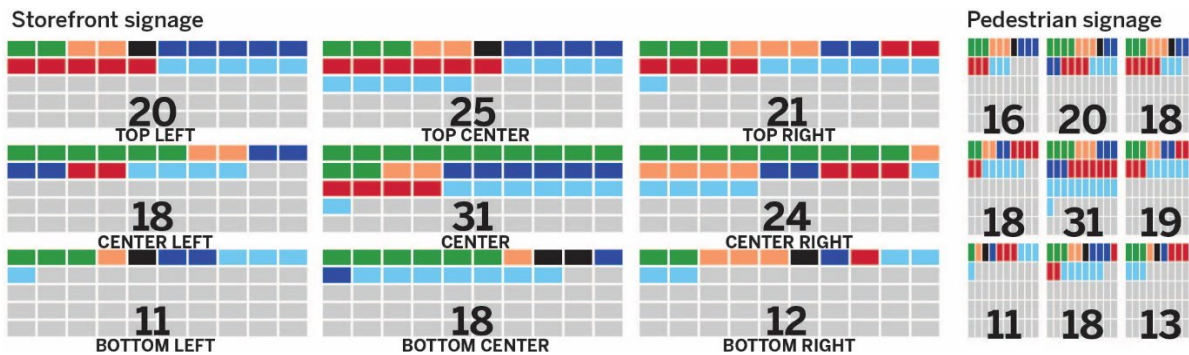

Figure 5. Frequency of the placement of Chinese characters on both the storefront and pedestrian signage.

When it comes to the placement of foreign language (non-Chinese) alphabets on both signage, the compositional preference is more heavily concentrated on top center, followed by the center, bottom center, top left and right, while being balanced in the bottom left and right sections. The horizontal or vertical orientation of a signage can either restrict or enhance the amount of information. This result justifies the observation that non-Chinese letters typically occupy space horizontally. Although any signage can employ the right color for contrasting purposes, vertically-stacking letters can impact the readability of the message as seen in the far left image in figure 6 (Thailandais, Vietnamien).

Unlike the reading protocols of Roman-based letterforms which reads only from the left to right, Chinese letters can be stacked vertically or horizontally (refer to figure 6). It is clear that stacking Roman-based letters can result in overcrowding which, in turn, can render a signage difficult to read from a distance. As a compromise for in vertical spaces, non-Chinese letters need careful discernment in how the letters are placed on the signboard. A vertical pedestrian signage has a commanding upright presence and if too many components are 'squeezed' into the surface of a signboard, legibility can be affected. However, when a healthy amount of space is allowed between the elements, legibility is no longer a pressing issue because there are 'breathing' spaces for all elements to co-exist on the signage.

Figure 6. Comparisons between the reading protocols for Chinese and other non-Chinese letterforms on three different restaurants in Paris (left and middle) and Antwerp (right).

The placement of logos on the top left section is highly popular. A study of the literature reveals that advertisements that utilize symbolic visuals can communicate more complex meanings (Featherstone, 1991; Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1990; McCracken, 1986). As such, evoking the essence of things Chinese is suggested through the depictions of eating utensils like chopsticks, takeout boxes, bowls, etc. Three Amsterdam-based restaurants such as 'Oriental City' features a set of door guardians on its main entrance (figure 7, center) while 'Dim Sum Court' resorts to placing line art of a female dancer adorned in traditional clothing, clasping a traditional musical instrument and floating in mid-air on their windows. 'Hoi Tin' features a pair of mythical dragons that flanked their main restaurant entrance (figure 7, right). This study suggests that logos or symbols are the most preferred option. Amsterdam is the only exception where their restaurants prefer graphics over logos (as seen in figure 7, left).

Figure 7. Decorative elements such as chopsticks and more elaborate architectural elements such as roof hoofs as well as mythical creatures are featured in these restaurants in Amsterdam.

5. Implications

In today's branding effort, signage plays a small but significant effort. In ensuring each patron the authentic Chinese gastronomic experience, some restaurants surveyed relied heavily on visual suggestions of eating utensils like chopsticks, takeout boxes, bowls or woks. In addition, there are the geometrical shapes, Chinese calligraphy, and Chinese architectural roof adornment which are also clear markers of things-Chinese. A city's ethnic district is identified by its inhabitants and atmosphere. Chinatowns are no exceptions. Historically, the demarcated area to contain Chinese immigrants that eventually became touristy Chinatowns can trace its existence back in time, revealing the historical exodus of Chinese immigrants to different parts of the world.

The specific architectural details in Chinatown's streetscape is characterized by details on building façades. Other design features such as large arch entrance structures can only be found in Antwerp, Belgium's officially recognized Chinatown. For cities without an official arch entrance such as the one in

Antwerp, the Asian communities seemingly bank on strength in numbers to offer a gastronomic and cultural experience for their patrons. Unlike some buildings in San Francisco's Chinatown where the Chinese-styled roofs adorned the top of buildings, restaurant signage or main entrances are tasked with the responsibility to carry a visual reminder of things-Chinese such as the roof structures that mimic palaces and temples. In this survey, the heaviest placement of graphics/images and architectural elements for both storefront and pedestrian signage are across the top and the left followed by a lighter load in the right sections. As for any placement of architectural elements such as a roof structure or the likeness of one, they usually occupy the upper sections of the signage or a restaurant's façade.

While these are clear-cut in the representation of things Asian or Chinese, other implications are not as direct. For example, the written form of Chinese characters in traditional versus simplified. While the former may suggest a purist's adherence to the true form of the Chinese writing system, the usage of traditional Chinese characters may also be one of the two other possibilities: to suggest the restaurant owner's place of origin or it may be a matter of preference. Meanwhile, a transliterated signage may provide historical and cultural context to our understanding of the history behind a restaurant's façade. This is because there are two major transliteration systems for the Chinese language. The most common is Hanyu Pinyin created in Mainland China and the increasingly obsolete Wade-Giles once used by Taiwan. By analyzing the restaurant's transliterated name, the initiated can make an educated guess of the 'biography' behind the restaurant.

6. Conclusion

The collected data suggested that restaurants that display the following three attributes can significantly evoke Chinese qualities: i) persistent and overwhelming applications of Chinese attributes in naming; ii) a universal preference for the red color; and iii) application of design elements with cultural attributes, calligraphic type styles, and architectural characteristics. This study provides an insight into a subject matter that is little studied but has nonetheless, demonstrated how simple elements of design, the effective usage of negative space, and colors can provide a type of 'vibe' that patrons can appreciate. A good design can lend value to a business by highlighting the content and making it easier and effective in attracting potential patrons. The right typestyle could lend an air of formality and trustworthiness to a gastronomic experience. However, there are many nuanced aspects which can influence the legibility and the effectiveness of a signage. Any signage that may also double as an advertisement for a business should not exist in a vacuum. Restaurant owners and designers must always bear in mind that in addition to a strategic location, and cost associated with the fabrication of the signage, it is also important to consider the immediate neighbors so as to create a niche for themselves. A restaurant has something gastronomically unique to offer and it should be reflected in its signage. The right and consistent storefront and pedestrian signage can amplify that uniqueness.

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