

# **Filipino Semiotic Landscape in Taiwan: constructed migrant identity in the visual space**

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## **Abstract**

As we traverse urban landscapes we come across linguistic and visual tokens in various places. In Taiwan, shop signs cover night markets and the interiors of department stores, buses are transformed into giant moving advertisements, even the money used to buy countless products all have semiotic/linguistic phenomena on them. The modern day flaneur will undoubtedly encounter a plethora of linguistic/semiotic phenomena in the urban environment especially in Taipei. As such, linguistic/semiotic landscape research is a way one may quite literally see the landscape as a text that can be read. Landscape not only includes the physical elements of a place but also the cultural representation of a place in an image. This is in line with approaches in cultural geography reading the landscape as 'text' which leads to more interpretive methodologies vs. morphological (Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987). As of June, 2016 there were more than 602,309 migrant workers in Taiwan of which Filipinos comprised a significant number along with Indonesians, Vietnamese and Thais. In addition, with Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen's pivot to strengthen economic ties with Southeast Asia as opposed to mainland China, issues surrounding these migrant worker communities are of ever increasing importance.

This article examines the semiotic landscape of Filipinos in Taiwan in order to shed light on their current social situation. Although there is scholarship on the Filipino community in Taiwan, thus far research using a semiotic/linguistic approach has been rather scanty, focusing mainly on history and/or sociology (Tseng & Huang, 2011) and (Lan, 2006). Applying theories grounded in geo-semiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and semiotic landscape (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010) will offer further insight into the issues surrounding Filipino migration and sociocultural status in Taiwan. In this article, multiple perspectives will be taken into account through analysis of linguistic landscape, television commercials, and contemporary art.

This article is divided into three themes. The first theme involves the Filipino community of Zhongshan North Road of which collected data includes 375 pictures of language signs and visual advertisements that were analyzed by 1) determining the productive participants (authors, designers, printers, speakers), 2) the text and/or image participants, 3) the receptive participants (readers, consumers, viewers, listeners etc.), and 4) interpretive symbolism. Second, five Taiwanese television commercials featuring local

depictions of Filipino domestic workers were visually and phonologically analyzed using semiotic and linguistic approaches respectively. Third, art by contemporary Filipino artist Ronald Ventura in *Project: Finding Home*, a solo exhibition held at MOCA, Taipei in 2016 was visually analyzed for themes dealing with Filipino migration. It is expected that investigation of these three themes will deepen understanding of current trends and social status of the Filipino community in Taiwan and in doing so shed light on intercultural adaptation and communication, cultural risk and global connectivity, cultural contact zones, and liminal migrant space.

Key words: Semiotics, linguistic landscape, sociolinguistics, migration, intercultural adaptation, globalization, cultural studies, Taiwan