

Migrant Semiotic Landscape in Taiwan: A Case Study of Zhongshan/Little Philippines

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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 phenomena on them. Thus, 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 paper explores the migrant semiotic landscape of Zhongshan in Taiwan, also known colloquially as ‘Little Philippines’ in order to shed light on the current social situation of Filipino migrants. Although there is scholarship on the Filipino community in Taiwan, thus far research using a semiotic/linguistic approach has not been used, focusing mainly on approaches grounded in history and/or sociology. Applying a geosemiotic approach (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) grounded in theory on the sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert, 2010) will offer further insight into the issues surrounding Filipino migration and their sociocultural status in Taiwan.

Through fieldwork in Zhongshan/’Little Philippines’ signs and visual advertisements were analyzed by using a geosemiotic approach. Investigation of the semiotic landscape highlighted current trends and social status of the Filipinos in Taiwan with implications for globalization, identity, and racialization.

Key words: Semiotics, linguistic landscape, sociolinguistics, migration, globalization, racialization, Taiwan, civic space