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Translation Regimes and Language Hierarchy in Huai Khwang's Multilingual Signage: Evidence From Bangkok's Emerging Chinese Commercial District

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Abstract—**This article examines how translation regimes and visual prominence jointly organise language hierarchy in Huai Khwang, Bangkok, a commercially dynamic district associated with Chinese-oriented urban change. Drawing on a district-wide corpus of 1,144 photographed public signs collected across six major routes between March 2024 and March 2025, the study analyses 840 multilingual signs by sector, language configuration, relative prominence, and translation regime. The results show that multilingual display in Huai Khwang is sectorally differentiated rather than uniform. Consumer-oriented sectors account for the largest share of multilingual signage, indicating that the district's visible multilingualism is driven primarily by market activity rather than by state signage alone. Thai remains foundational to public legibility and institutional authority, English is strategically elevated in sectors oriented to access, mobility, and commercial reach, and Chinese is highly visible but selectively dominant in Chinese-oriented commercial addressivity. Direct translation is the dominant regime overall, especially in government signage and in sectors where communicative clarity and service transparency are central, whereas partial translation is strongest in tourism and retail and wholesale consumption, where branding and selective audience targeting carry greater weight. The article argues that Huai Khwang is best understood not as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, but as a stratified multilingual marketplace in which language hierarchy varies systematically by sector, audience, and communicative purpose.**

Index Terms—**linguistic landscape, multilingual signage, translation regime**

I. Introduction

Public signs are not neutral carriers of information. Landry and Bourhis (1997) showed that public signage has both informational and symbolic value, while Spolsky and Cooper (1991) demonstrated that language choice on signs is shaped by expected readers, social conditions, and practical constraints of display. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) further argued that signs should be understood as symbolic constructions of public space rather than as transparent labels. Taken together, these studies make clear that the key issue in multilingual public display is not simply whether multiple languages appear, but how they are ordered, valued, and made meaningful.

This issue is especially important in commercially dynamic urban districts. In such settings, languages rarely function as equivalent communicative units. Instead, they often perform differentiated roles: one language may secure local legitimacy, another may signal mobility or prestige, and another may target a specific market segment. As Leeman and Modan (2009) showed in Chinatown, and Kasanga (2012) similarly demonstrated in Phnom Penh, multilingual signage is closely tied to commodification and audience design. Public multilingualism is therefore better understood as an organised semiotic economy than as a flat inventory of languages. French and Armitage (2020) similarly question monolingual assumptions in linguistically diverse contexts. Leung and Jenkins (2020) further argue for a flexible multilingualism perspective that better captures contemporary communicative practice.

Huai Khwang is a particularly revealing site in which to examine these processes. Recent studies have shown that Chinese visibility in the district is significant and that parts of Huai Khwang have been framed as an emerging Chinatown shaped by authenticity claims, urban governance, and Chinese-oriented place branding. Wu et al. (2020) highlighted conflicting discourses around Pracha Rat Bamphen Road, Chaisingkananont et al. (2026) examined signage through xinyimin visibility and governance, and Wu et al. (2026) showed how culinary signage participates in Chinese-oriented place branding. These studies establish the importance of the district, but they do not yet explain how multilingual hierarchy is organised across Huai Khwang as a broader cross-sector public-sign environment.

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The present article addresses that issue by focusing on the relationship between translation regime and visual prominence. This focus matters because the co-presence of Thai, English, and Chinese on a sign does not imply equal communicative load or equal symbolic value. Reh (2004) showed that multilingual writing may distribute information unevenly across languages, and Chen and Numtong (2023) demonstrated that Thai–Chinese public-sign translation is shaped by communicative purpose and target readership rather than by simple lexical equivalence. Translation and prominence therefore provide a productive way of explaining how hierarchy becomes materially visible in multilingual signage.

Against this background, the article examines Huai Khwang not simply as another multilingual district in Bangkok, and not merely as a descriptive instance of an emerging Chinatown, but as a stratified multilingual commercial district in which Thai, English, and Chinese are assigned unequal but co-functional roles. Using a district-wide corpus of public signs collected across six major routes in Huai Khwang, the study asks how language hierarchy is produced through sectoral distribution, visual prominence, and translation practice.

The article makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides a broader district-level account of Huai Khwang's signage than previous studies, which have tended to focus on narrower streets, themes, or sign domains. Analytically, it brings visual prominence and translation regime into a single framework, showing how they work together rather than as separate dimensions of multilingual display. Theoretically, it argues that Huai Khwang is best understood not as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, but as a stratified multilingual marketplace in which language hierarchy varies systematically by sector, audience, and communicative purpose.

The article is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: How are Thai, Chinese, and English distributed and hierarchised across major sign sectors in Huai Khwang?

RQ2: How do translation regimes vary across commercial and official signage in the district?

II. Literature Review and Research Gap

Public signs are not neutral carriers of information. They are visible artefacts through which languages are ordered, valued, and made socially consequential in public space. Landry and Bourhis (1997) established linguistic landscape research by showing that public signage has both informational and symbolic value. Spolsky and Cooper (1991) demonstrated that language choice on signs is shaped by expected readers, social circumstances, and practical conditions of display. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) then argued that signs should be understood as symbolic constructions of public space, while Ben-Rafael (2009) extended this sociological view by treating signage as an index of public negotiation and social positioning. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) further showed that visibility alone cannot explain the social role of languages in multilingual settings. Taken together, these studies shift the analytical question from whether multiple languages are present to how they are distributed, prioritised, and made meaningful.

This shift is especially important in commercial multilingual environments. Coulmas (2009) linked linguistic landscaping to the public sphere, showing that language display is inseparable from social authority and publicity. Leeman and Modan (2009) demonstrated that Chinatown signage often commodifies language rather than simply representing ethnicity. Kasanga (2012) likewise showed that multilingual signs in Phnom Penh reflect commercial targeting as much as communicative necessity. Manan et al. (2015) further argued that politics, economics, and identity operate together in multilingual urban display. Multilingual signage, then, should not be read as a flat inventory of languages. It is better understood as an organised semiotic field in which different languages perform different forms of social and commercial work.

Translation is one of the principal mechanisms through which such hierarchy becomes visible. Reh (2004) remains especially useful because her reader-oriented typology distinguishes among direct translation, partial translation, and functionally differentiated multilingual writing. This distinction matters because the co-presence of Thai, English, and Chinese on a sign does not imply equal informational load or equivalent communicative function. Tan (2011) similarly showed that naming practices may involve differentiated symbolic functions rather than straightforward repetition across languages. In the Thai context, Chen and Numtong (2023) demonstrated that Thai–Chinese public-sign translation in medical institutions is shaped by communicative precision, standardisation, and target readership rather than by simple lexical transfer. Translation on signs should therefore not be treated as a minor stylistic feature. It is one of the main ways in which language hierarchy becomes materially visible.

Thailand provides a strong setting for this kind of inquiry. Smalley (1994) described Thailand as a complex language ecology shaped by national hierarchy and regional diversity. Premsrirat (2006) likewise characterised Thailand's language situation as one in which Thai remains institutionally central even when other languages become publicly visible. Rappa and Wee (2006) situated Thailand within a broader Southeast Asian pattern in which language policy, modernity, and market pressure interact unevenly. At the level of public signage, Huebner (2006) showed that Bangkok already exhibited codemixing, multilingual layering, and language change that could not be reduced to neat monolingual orders. Prapobratanakul (2016) demonstrated how hybridity and globalisation shaped shop naming in a Bangkok commercial neighbourhood, while Sutthinaraphan (2016) showed that multilingual display on Bangkok's Skytrain was strategically organised rather than incidental.

Subsequent studies across Thailand confirmed that multilingual signage is patterned by place, sector, and audience. Thongtong (2016) documented the strong presence of bilingual and multilingual signage on Nimmanhemin Road in

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Chiang Mai, and Mu and Rungruang (2013) found that English was especially salient in Chiang Mai tourist areas. Prasert and Zilli (2019) showed that Pattaya signage was organised by tourist-commercial logics, whereas Vivas-Peraza (2020) showed that English in Hat Yai functioned as a visible international code. Pipattarasakul (2021) demonstrated that multilingual display in Bangkok's historic railway station reflected transport, heritage, and public communication functions. Rhekhalilit (2020) and Siricharoen (2016) showed that university spaces in Thailand also produce their own patterned multilingual orders. More recently, Pan (2024) argued, through a comparative study of Thai universities, that linguistic landscapes should be analysed comparatively rather than descriptively. Pathanasin (2025) showed that signage in Phuket must be understood through identity, tourism, and policy together. Mongkolyos et al. (2023) described commercial signage in Hua Hin as structured by business function and audience, while Bennui (2025) showed that English on Koh Lipe is glocalised through tourism and localisation. Collectively, this literature makes clear that multilingual display in Thailand is not random; it is organised by market sectors, place identity, and communicative design.

Huai Khwang is one of the most revealing sites in which to examine these developments. Wu and Techasan (2016) showed that Chinese on commercial signs in Yaowarat carried symbolic and identity value. Wu et al. (2020) then argued that Pracha Rat Bamphen Road in Huai Khwang could be read as an emerging Chinatown shaped by authenticity claims and conflicting urban discourses. Chaisingkananont et al. (2026) examined how urban signage in Huai Khwang is interpreted through xinyimin visibility and governance, while Wu et al. (2026) demonstrated that culinary signage in the district participates in Chinese-oriented place branding. These studies are important, but they focus mainly on discourse, perception, governance, and restaurant-centred branding. They do not yet answer a different question: how translation regimes and visual prominence together organise language hierarchy across a broader cross-sector corpus of signs.

Recent comparative work elsewhere in Asia points in precisely that direction. Huang and Zhao (2025) showed that Chengdu restaurant signage expresses a gradient of compliance between language policy and local identity rather than a simple multilingual spread. Nambu and Ono (2025) demonstrated that Shin-Okubo contains differentiated neighbourhood semiotics rather than a single ethnic-signage pattern. Wang and Gao (2025) showed that English in Luang Prabang occupies a tourism-oriented niche distinct from other languages. Wang et al. (2025) linked multilingual shop signs in Lhasa to place-specific cultural ordering. Xia (2025) showed that different districts in Hong Kong develop distinct indexical orders, while Yao et al. (2025) demonstrated that multilingualism in an ethnic city in China changes through patterned shifts rather than random accumulation. These studies support a stronger claim for Huai Khwang: the key issue is not whether the district is multilingual, but how hierarchy is produced through sectoral differentiation, prominence, and translation.

A sectoral approach is especially important because commodification does not operate uniformly across urban space. Leeman and Modan (2009) showed that the market value of language in Chinatown depends on business type and target consumers. Kasanga (2012) similarly demonstrated that multilingual shop signs vary by commercial niche, not just by language mix. Pietikäinen and Holmes (2011) connected linguistic diversity to local economic activity, showing that sign choice can track value creation rather than simply demographic composition. Manan et al. (2015) likewise argued that identity and economy are intertwined in multilingual display. For Huai Khwang, this means that a restaurant strip, a hotel corridor, a government frontage, and a retail-wholesale cluster may all be multilingual, but they do not necessarily organise multilingualism in the same way.

This article addresses that gap through a district-wide analysis of public signage in Huai Khwang. It asks how Thai, English, and Chinese are hierarchised through visual prominence and translation across sectors rather than whether the district is simply "more Chinese" or more multilingual. Empirically, the article provides a broader district-level corpus than previous Huai Khwang studies. Analytically, it integrates visual prominence with translation regime. Theoretically, it argues that Huai Khwang is best understood as a stratified multilingual commercial district in which language hierarchy varies by sector, audience, and communicative purpose.

III. Methodology

A. Study Site and Corpus

Huai Khwang is a mixed urban district in Bangkok where commerce, accommodation, mobility, entertainment, and public services intersect. For the purposes of this article, it is treated not simply as an emerging Chinatown but as a multilingual commercial district whose signage can be analysed across sectors. This framing is preferable because it captures differentiated language practices across the district rather than reducing the area to a single ethnic label.

The spatial design follows six principal routes documented in the source project: Ratchadaphisek Road, Pracha Rat Bamphen Road, Watthana Tham Road, Thiam Ruam Mit Road, Pracha Uthit Road, and the Mengjai intersection area. Figure 1 shows the study area and the six data-collection routes. Fieldwork was conducted between March 2024 and March 2025. The full corpus comprises 1,144 photographed public signs, classified into six sectors: consumer goods, retail and wholesale consumption, beauty and health, accommodation, tourism, and government signage. From the full corpus, 840 multilingual signs were retained for detailed analysis. This distinction is analytically important because the larger corpus establishes the overall signage ecology of the district, whereas the multilingual subset enables closer analysis of hierarchy and translation on signs containing more than one language.

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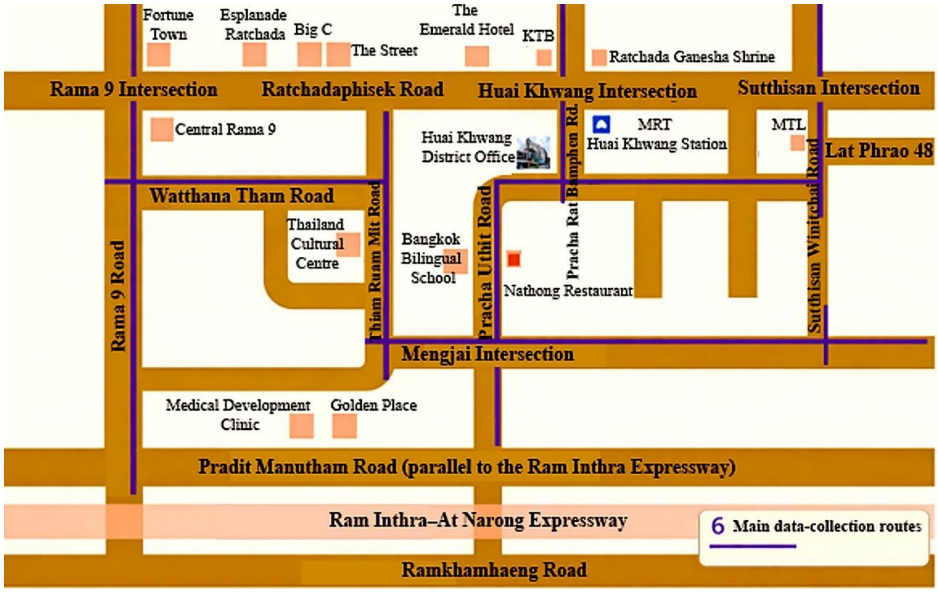


Figure 1. Map of Huai Khwang and the Six Data-Collection Routes

B. Data Collection and Inclusion Criteria

The corpus includes signs located in publicly accessible space. Both government and non-government signs were included. A sign was eligible for analysis only when at least one written language was visibly displayed. Logos, product packaging, standard abbreviations, and purely non-textual symbols were not treated as primary evidence of language choice.

Photographs were taken in situ during walking-based fieldwork and stored in JPG format. This approach is appropriate for district-level linguistic landscape research because it captures signage as encountered in everyday urban space rather than through selective digital sampling. The year-long collection window also reduces the risk that the analysis depends too heavily on short-term or episodic signage conditions.

To improve corpus consistency, the study adopted an explicit permanence rule. Only signs judged to be materially stable and publicly displayed as part of the district's ongoing signage environment were retained. Signs associated with businesses that had already ceased operation were excluded. Where identical wording was repeated by the same institution or business in multiple locations, only one instance was counted. This procedure reduced artificial inflation and kept the analysis focused on language patterning rather than repetition frequency.

C. Coding and Analytical Procedure

Each sign was treated as one analytical unit and coded for sector, producer type, language configuration, relative prominence, translation regime, and interpretive function. Sector categories were consumer goods, retail and wholesale consumption, beauty and health, accommodation, tourism, and government signage. Producer type broadly tracked the distinction between top-down and bottom-up signage. Language configuration identified whether a sign was monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual and recorded the languages present. Relative prominence was operationalised primarily through comparative font size and layout hierarchy. Translation regime followed Reh (2004): direct translation, partial translation, and free writing. Interpretive function captured the communicative and symbolic role of the sign in relation to the study's theoretical framework. This coding structure restates the logic of the thesis corpus in a form more suitable for journal review.

The analysis proceeded in four steps. First, the full corpus was classified by sector and language configuration to establish the overall structure of Huai Khwang's signage ecology. Second, the multilingual subset was analysed for visual prominence, especially the relative size and ordering of Thai, English, and Chinese on the same sign. Third, multilingual signs were classified by translation regime. Fourth, the results were interpreted through the frameworks of Landry and Bourhis (1997), Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), Ben-Rafael (2009), Spolsky and Cooper (1991), and Reh (2004). Giles (1973) was used only as a supplementary interpretive frame where convergence, divergence, or symbolic accommodation helped clarify sign function; it was not treated as the article's main explanatory model.

D. Methodological Scope and Limitation

The main strengths of the study are the size of the corpus, the district-wide route design, and the integration of sectoral comparison, visual prominence, and translation regime within one dataset. These features provide stronger explanatory leverage than a single-street or single-domain design.

At the same time, the source project was conducted as single-researcher fieldwork and coding, and it did not generate intercoder coefficients. The present article therefore does not make claims about intercoder reliability that the original

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project cannot support. Instead, it prioritises methodological transparency by keeping the inclusion criteria explicit, the coding variables rule-based, and the analytical claims closely aligned with the documented corpus.

IV. Results

A. Overall Corpus Profile

Huai Khwang's linguistic landscape is shaped primarily by commerce rather than by state signage. As Table 1 shows, the largest sector in the full corpus of 1,144 photographed signs was consumer goods (n = 431, 37.67%), followed by retail and wholesale consumption (n = 232, 20.28%), accommodation (n = 168, 14.69%), beauty and health (n = 155, 13.55%), government signage (n = 117, 10.23%), and tourism (n = 41, 3.58%). This distribution indicates that the district's visible multilingualism is generated above all by market activity, service provision, and everyday commercial interaction rather than by institutional signage alone. Figure 2 visualises the same distribution.

Table 1
Corpus Composition by Sign Sector

Sector	Signs (n)	Percent
Consumer goods	431	37.67
Retail and wholesale consumption	232	20.28
Accommodation	168	14.69
Beauty and health	155	13.55
Government signage	117	10.23
Tourism	41	3.58
Total	1,144	100.00

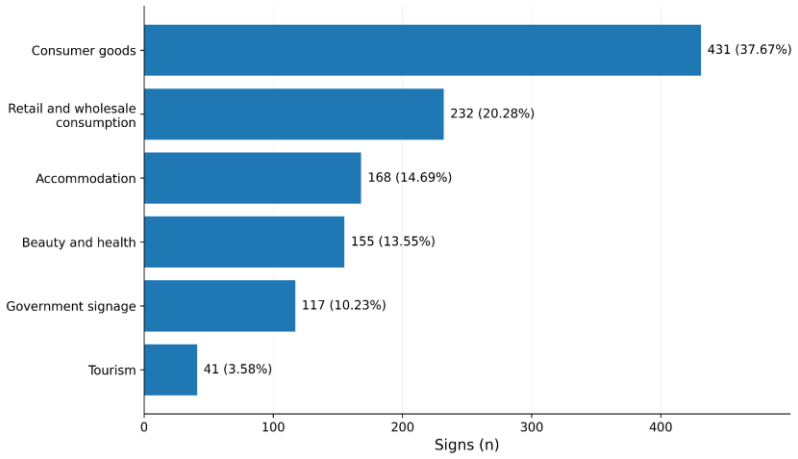


Figure 2. Sectoral Distribution of Photographed Signs in Huai Khwang (N = 1,144)

The multilingual subset further shows that multilingual display is not evenly distributed across domains. As Table 2 indicates, consumer-oriented sectors account for the largest shares of multilingual signs, especially consumer goods (n = 303), retail and wholesale consumption (n = 163), beauty and health (n = 138), accommodation (n = 121), government signage (n = 83), and tourism (n = 32). Multilingualism in Huai Khwang is therefore concentrated where signs mediate among customers, residents, visitors, and service users. This already suggests that multilingual display in the district is sectorally organised rather than uniformly distributed.

Table 2
Cross-Sector Distribution of Multilingual Signs

Sector	Multilingual signs (n)	Percent of multilingual subset
Consumer goods	303	36.07
Retail and wholesale consumption	163	19.40
Beauty and health	138	16.43
Accommodation	121	14.40
Government signage	83	9.88
Tourism	32	3.81
Total	840	100.00

B. Language Hierarchy by Visual Prominence

Prominence patterns show that multilingual hierarchy in Huai Khwang is differentiated rather than uniform. Within Thai–English pairings across the multilingual corpus, English was the most frequently enlarged language: signs with EN > TH accounted for 253 cases (30.12%), compared with 219 cases (26.07%) for TH > EN and 64 cases (7.62%) for

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equal-size Thai–English display. This indicates that English functions not merely as an auxiliary code, but as a visibly elevated language of accessibility, prestige, and market reach in substantial parts of the district. Table 3 summarises the dominant prominence configurations across the multilingual corpus.

Thai nonetheless remains structurally central. Within the Thai–English–Chinese subset, the most frequent trilingual hierarchy was TH > EN > CH (n = 109, 12.98%), followed by EN > TH > CH (n = 64, 7.62%), whereas CH > EN > TH was much less common (n = 23, 2.74%). Even where English is foregrounded, Thai therefore continues to anchor the district's broader public semiotic order.

Figure 3 clarifies how these prominence patterns vary by sector. English-led prominence is strongest in retail and wholesale consumption (71%), followed by tourism (61%) and accommodation (56%). Thai-led prominence is strongest in government signage (100%) and remains dominant in beauty and health (66%). Consumer goods is evenly split between Thai-led and English-led prominence (41% each). Chinese-led dominance remains limited across sectors. Overall, Huai Khwang does not exhibit a simple replacement of Thai by English or Chinese; rather, it displays a patterned hierarchy in which Thai remains foundational, English is strategically elevated, and Chinese is selectively mobilised.

TABLE 3
DOMINANT PROMINENCE CONFIGURATIONS ACROSS MULTILINGUAL SIGNS

Language configuration	Relative prominence	Signs (n)	Percent
TH–EN	EN > TH	253	30.12
TH–EN	TH > EN	219	26.07
TH–EN	Equal	64	7.62
TH–CH	CH > TH	20	2.38
TH–CH	TH > CH	19	2.26
TH–CH	Equal	5	0.60
EN–CH	EN > CH	2	0.24
EN–CH	Equal	1	0.12
TH–EN–CH	TH > EN > CH	109	12.98
TH–EN–CH	EN > TH > CH	64	7.62
TH–EN–CH	CH > EN > TH	23	2.74
TH–EN–CH–JP	TH > EN > CH > JP	16	1.90
TH–EN–CH–JP	EN > TH > CH > JP	5	0.60
TH–EN–CH–KR	TH > EN > CH > KR	10	1.19
TH–EN–CH–KR	EN > TH > CH > KR	5	0.60
Other low-frequency configurations	Grouped remainder	25	2.98
Total		840	100.00

Note. "Other low-frequency configurations" pools configurations not reported individually in order to preserve table readability while retaining the full multilingual total (N = 840).

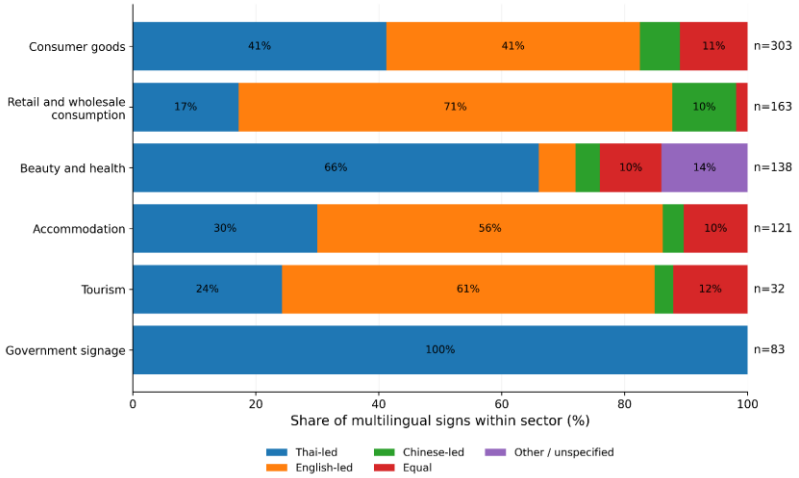


Figure 3. Cross-Sector Visual Hierarchy Across Multilingual Signs in Huai Khwang

Note. Bars show the within-sector distribution of visually dominant prominence patterns, grouped into Thai-led, English-led, Chinese-led, equal-size, and other/unspecified configurations. Sector totals are n = 303 for consumer goods, n = 163 for retail and wholesale consumption, n = 138 for beauty and health, n = 121 for accommodation, n = 32 for tourism, and n = 83 for government signage.

C. Translation Regimes Across Sectors

Translation patterns reveal an equally structured form of multilingual differentiation. As Table 4 shows, direct translation was the most common regime across the 840 multilingual signs, followed by partial translation and then free writing. However, this aggregate pattern conceals substantial sectoral variation. Figure 4 visualises the same contrast.

Direct translation was strongest in government signage (77.11%) and remained the majority pattern in beauty and health (62.32%), consumer goods (59.08%), and accommodation (59.50%). In these sectors, multilingual signage

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appears to prioritise clarity, service information, or formal accessibility. Direct translation is therefore most closely associated with signs whose primary function is informational, regulatory, or commercially transparent.

By contrast, partial translation dominated in tourism (62.50%) and retail and wholesale consumption (54.60%). This pattern suggests that these sectors rely more heavily on selective multilingualism: brand names, product labels, or commercially meaningful terms are often retained in one language, while explanatory material is supplied in another. Partial translation thus functions not as incomplete translation, but as a structured strategy that preserves symbolic or commercial specificity while still providing usable information across audiences.

Free writing remained marginal overall (3.57%), but it was most visible in accommodation (12.40%) and only sporadically present elsewhere. Where it occurs, it does not aim at semantic equivalence. Instead, different languages carry different communicative functions, making free writing the most overtly symbolic translation regime in the corpus, even though it is the least frequent.

TABLE 4
TRANSLATION REGIMES BY SECTOR

Sector	Direct translation	Partial translation	Free writing
Consumer goods	179 (59.08%)	116 (38.28%)	8 (2.64%)
Retail and wholesale consumption	72 (44.17%)	89 (54.60%)	2 (1.23%)
Beauty and health	86 (62.32%)	48 (34.78%)	4 (2.90%)
Accommodation	72 (59.50%)	34 (28.10%)	15 (12.40%)
Government signage	64 (77.11%)	19 (22.89%)	0 (0.00%)
Tourism	11 (34.38%)	20 (62.50%)	1 (3.12%)
Overall (N = 840)	484 (57.62%)	326 (38.81%)	30 (3.57%)

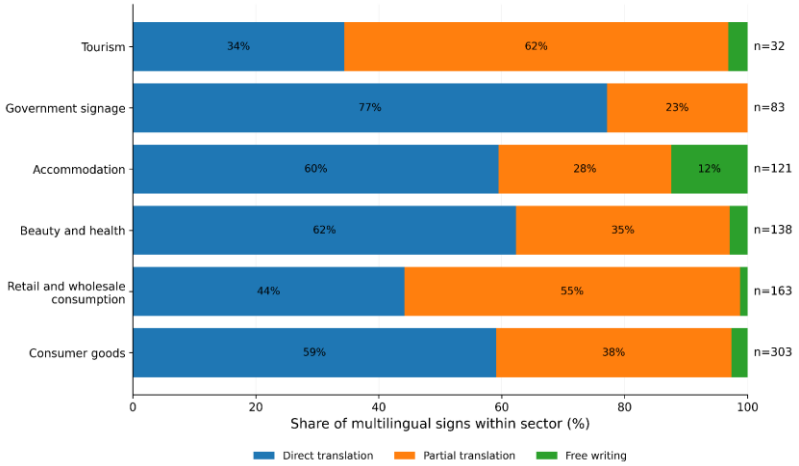


Figure 4. Translation Regimes Across Multilingual Signs in Huai Khwang by Sector.
Note. Bars show the within-sector distribution of direct translation, partial translation, and free writing. Sector totals are n = 303 for consumer goods, n = 163 for retail and wholesale consumption, n = 138 for beauty and health, n = 121 for accommodation, n = 83 for government signage, and n = 32 for tourism.

D. Functional Differentiation of Thai, English, and Chinese

When prominence and translation are considered together, the results point to a clear functional differentiation. Thai operates as the language of local anchoring, public legitimacy, and baseline legibility. English functions as a language of translocal access, cosmopolitan presentation, and service visibility. Chinese plays a more selective role, indexing commercial targeting, ethnic-market addressivity, and, in some cases, the symbolic value of Chinese-oriented consumption. Importantly, Chinese is not absent from high-visibility signage, but it rarely dominates across the district as a whole.

Multilingualism in Huai Khwang is therefore not simply additive. The languages displayed on signs do not merely repeat the same message; they are distributed according to sectoral logics. Government signage prioritises clarity and institutional accessibility. Tourism and retail rely more heavily on selective multilingualism that combines information with branding. Accommodation uses multilingual display to negotiate both practical access and market positioning, while consumer goods and beauty-and-health signage combine commercial clarity with symbolic indexicality. Taken together, the results support the interpretation of Huai Khwang as a sectorally differentiated multilingual marketplace rather than a uniformly Chinese-dominant district.

V. DISCUSSION

The results show that Huai Khwang should not be understood as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, nor reduced to a simple case of increasing multilingual diversity. Rather, it is more accurately described as a stratified multilingual marketplace in which Thai, English, and Chinese are distributed unevenly but co-functionally across sectors. This

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interpretation refines earlier work on Huai Khwang. Wu et al. (2020) were right to identify Pracha Rat Bamphen Road as part of an emerging Chinese-oriented urban formation, and Chaisingkananont et al. (2026) and Wu et al. (2026) have since shown how governance, visibility, and culinary place branding shape the district's semiotic profile. Yet the present results indicate that Chinese visibility alone is insufficient to explain the organisation of Huai Khwang's broader signage ecology once the district is examined through a cross-sector corpus rather than a single street or thematic domain.

What emerges is not Chinese takeover but hierarchical multilingual differentiation. Thai remains foundational to public legitimacy and local legibility. English is strategically elevated in the sectors most strongly oriented to mobility, service access, and market reach, especially retail and wholesale consumption, tourism, and accommodation. Chinese is highly visible, but its dominance is selective rather than generalised. It becomes most salient where market targeting, consumer addressivity, and Chinese-oriented commercial indexing are most relevant, but it rarely displaces Thai or English across the district as a whole. This pattern is consistent with work showing that multilingual signage is structured by audience design and economic function rather than by multilingual accumulation alone. Leeman and Modan (2009) showed that commodified language in Chinatown is shaped by commercial addressivity, not simply ethnicity. Kasanga (2012) likewise demonstrated that multilingual shop signs vary by commercial niche. Pietikäinen and Holmes (2011) further showed that linguistic diversity may be closely tied to local economic life. Taken together, these perspectives help explain why Huai Khwang displays layered multilingual ordering rather than a flat Chinese-dominant semiotic regime.

The translation results deepen this interpretation. Reh's (2004) framework is especially productive here because it distinguishes multilingual repetition from multilingual differentiation. In Huai Khwang, direct translation dominates where communicative clarity is central, especially in government signage and in sectors where service transparency matters. This pattern suggests that multilingual display is often used to widen access without redistributing symbolic authority. By contrast, partial translation is strongest in tourism and retail and wholesale consumption, where branding, selective audience targeting, and commercially meaningful terms carry greater weight. Chen and Numtong (2023) similarly showed that Thai–Chinese public-sign translation is shaped by communicative purpose and target readership rather than by simple lexical equivalence. In Huai Khwang, partial translation therefore functions not as incomplete translation but as a structured regime of controlled multilingualism in which languages carry different informational loads.

A further implication concerns the symbolic economy of English and Chinese. The results do not support a zero-sum model in which one language replaces the other. Instead, the two languages occupy different semiotic niches. English remains the more generalised language of translocal access, cosmopolitan presentation, and service visibility. Chinese is more targeted and commercially specific, particularly where signs index Chinese-speaking consumers, Chinese-oriented goods, or Chinese-linked business ownership. This distinction helps explain why Huai Khwang cannot be described either as a Thai–English bilingual zone with Chinese additions or as a new Chinatown that displaces Bangkok's broader public language order. Huang and Zhao (2025) showed that restaurant signage in Chengdu reflects graded alignment between language policy and local identity. Nambu and Ono (2025) demonstrated that Shin-Okubo contains internally differentiated multilingual orders rather than a single ethnic-signage pattern. Xia (2025) likewise showed that different urban zones can produce different indexical orders within the same city. Huai Khwang belongs to this broader pattern of internally differentiated multilingual urbanism.

The article's main theoretical contribution lies in showing that language hierarchy in Huai Khwang is produced through the interaction of sector, prominence, and translation rather than through visibility alone. Public multilingualism becomes analytically meaningful when it is read as a structured system of unequal but co-functional roles. In this case, Thai anchors public order, English extends market and service reach, and Chinese selectively intensifies ethnic-commercial addressivity. The district's signage ecology is therefore best understood not as a simple accumulation of languages in space, but as a patterned semiotic arrangement shaped by sectoral logic, communicative purpose, and audience orientation.

VI. Conclusion

This article has shown that multilingual signage in Huai Khwang is organised through sector-specific hierarchies rather than through flat multilingual coexistence. Using a district-wide corpus of 1,144 photographed signs, including 840 multilingual signs analysed in detail, the study demonstrates that Thai, English, and Chinese are distributed unevenly across sectors and assigned different communicative and symbolic roles. Thai remains foundational to public legibility and institutional authority. English is strategically elevated in sectors oriented to access, mobility, and commercial prestige. Chinese is highly visible but selectively dominant, especially where targeted commercial addressivity is most relevant. Huai Khwang should therefore be understood not as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, but as a stratified multilingual marketplace.

The study contributes empirically by providing a broader district-level account of Huai Khwang's signage than previous studies, analytically by integrating visual prominence and translation regime within a single framework, and theoretically by showing how multilingual hierarchy is materially organised through sectoral differentiation. Its main limitation is that the source corpus was collected and coded within a single-researcher design and therefore does not

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support claims about intercoder reliability. Even so, the findings provide a strong basis for further work on multilingual urban change in Bangkok. Future research could extend this design through diachronic comparison, audience-centred interpretation, or multimodal analysis of colour, imagery, and spatial placement alongside written language.

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