An Investigation into the Linguistic Landscape of Cultural Tourist Scenic Areas: A Case Study of Guandi Temple in Shanxi Province

Wenjin Qi*, Liquan He

Yuncheng University, Yuncheng, Shanxi, China
*Correspondence Author

Abstract: *This study aims to investigate empirically the linguistic landscape of Guandi Temple, a 4A cultural tourist scenic area located in Shanxi Province in China. The study has found that most of the language signs use two or more languages, and only a small number of signs are in Chinese. Among the five languages that appear in the scenic area, including Chinese, English, French, Japanese and Korean, Chinese is the "preferred code", performing informative function, while English, French, Japanese and Korean belong to the "marginalized code", mainly performing symbolic function and highlighting the "internationalization and linguistic diversity". The study has also found that the most obvious differences are reflected in the language types and signage design. The "top-down" signs are set up by the scenic spots and the government, which show a strong bilingual and multilingual tendency, while the "bottom-up" signs are set up by individual businesses, which show a strong monolingual tendency. Moreover, from the perspective of sign designing, "top-down" signs are consistent and elegant, while "bottom-up" signs are diverse and crude. Three issues could be identified in the linguistic landscape construction, such as uneven quality of translations, non-standardized use of language, and lack of overall planning. Accordingly, it is suggested that the scenic area management authority should take into account the diversity of the tourists source countries; and local cultural elements should be integrated into the "top-down" signs. Lastly, the "bottom-up" signs should increase the number of languages other than Chinese to improve the service capacity so as to better utilize the economic value of the linguistic landscape and promote the Guan Gong culture to the world market.*

Keywords: Linguistic landscape, Cultural tourism, Guandi Temple, Shanxi province.

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of tourism industry, the culture and tourism craze is gaining increasing attention in both industrial as well as academic perspectives. In particular, the analysis of tourism discourse has attracted extensive attention from scholars of various disciplines, for instance, tourism marketing, sociology, social semiotics, applied linguistics, and so on.

Linguistic landscape theory is one of the major relevant research themes in this regard. It contains unique artistic, historical, cultural and educational values. Linguistic landscapes reflect the vitality of a city and the degree of civilization. Linguistic landscapes in a scenic area not only affect tourists' sense of experience and participation enthusiasm, but also play an indispensable role in the integrated development of cultural tourism.

Guandi Temple, located in Shanxi Province (China), is a 4A-level cultural tourist scenic spot. It was inscribed on the reserve list of China's World Cultural Heritage in 2012 and is a national key cultural relics protection unit ever since. It is known as the largest existing palace-style Taoist architectural complex and martial arts temple. It is also known as "the ancestral Temple of Guan Yu", who was one of the leading generals of the Shu kingdom, and is known for having a strong sense of righteousness. After his death, a religious cult slowly developed around him. His image had changed into a folk god of great virtue and righteousness.

This study attempts to develop an empirical research on the linguistic landscape of Guandi Temple for its rich and dynamic linguistic landscape resources. It aims to investigate the status quo of the linguistic landscape in the scenic area and explore the existing issues in the way of enhancing tourists' experience and promoting Guangong culture to a wide and international scope.

2. Literature Review

The concept of linguistic landscape was proposed by Canadian scholars Landry & Bourhis (1997) as "the language that appears on public street signs, billboards, street names, place names, store signs, and public signs on government buildings collectively constitutes the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration." In other words, the object of linguistic landscape research is the written language visualized in public space. Signs are usually categorized into two types in linguistic landscape studies: "top-down signage" and "bottom-up signage". Top-down signage is also called official signage, such as street names and building names, set up by public or governmental agencies; bottom-up signage is also called private signage, set up by private individuals or businesses for commercial or informational purposes, such as store signs, private announcements, commercial advertisements, posters, and so on.

In addition, the linguistic landscape has two major functions: the informational function and the symbolic function. The informational function refers to the explicit function of the linguistic landscape. It helps people understand the geographic boundaries and composition of a certain language group in a public area, the characteristics of the language used within the area and the pattern of language use. For example, linguistic signage can provide local residents or outsiders with the most basic information such as location, direction, and the

business of stores.

Symbolic function refers to the invisible function of the linguistic landscape. Based on the textual form and content of the linguistic landscape, people can infer the linguistic power, social identity and status. It encompasses the understanding of language value and status by members of the language community.

The linguistic landscape not only reflects the value of language use, but also influences the construction of social contexts as well as people's language attitudes and behaviors. It is with the linguistic landscape in the space of tourist attractions through the presentation of linguistic elements with regional characteristics, which makes the tourist culture of different regional attractions have a certain "visibility", and it can be understood, recognized and accepted by domestic and foreign tourists, at the same time, thus enhancing the international competitiveness of the attractions.

As a new path to study the phenomenon of multilingualism and a good method to examine the sociolinguistic ecology of urban society, linguistic landscape has become one of the hottest topics for interdisciplinary research in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics.

Landry & Bourhis (1997) put forward the concept of linguistic landscape as "the visibility and prominence of the language on the public and commercial signage of a particular territory or region." Shohamy & Waksman (2009) expanded the concept of linguistic landscape to include all discourse that occurs in public space, including texts, images, objects, places of placement, and people who interact with public space. After the concept of linguistic landscape was put forward, researchers gradually expanded the study of linguistic landscape from the initial urban space to the tourism field. Edelman (2005) examined the Kalverstraat, a famous tourist neighborhood in the Dutch capital of Amsterdam, and found that most signs were monolingual, with only about a quarter of the signs being bilingual or multilingual, and that linguistic signs had the highest frequency of Dutch and English. Since then, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the linguistic landscapes of tourist venues. For example, Kallen (2009) examined the linguistic landscape of four cities in Ireland and Northern Ireland. His study found that in Galway City, where tourism is more developed, the frequency of Irish language signs is significantly higher than in other cities, indicating that the Irish language is an important cultural element for tourists' travelling experience.

The research on the linguistic landscape of tourist attractions started late in China. Wang & Zhu (2021) studied the linguistic landscape and language services of the Five Avenues Scenic Spot in Tianjin. Pang (2023) investigated the linguistic landscape of a 4A tourist attraction. Wu & Zhan (2022) focused on the translation optimization strategy of the linguistic landscape of the modified scenic spots by conducting research on Sanhe Ancient Town and Wanda Garden in Hefei City. Liu (2024) conducted a research on the linguistic landscape of Xinjiang International Grand Bazaar tourist attractions. All of them focused on the status quo of linguistic landscape of tourist attractions and aim to explore the ways to enhance sustainable tourist development.

Accordingly, this study intends to analyze the linguistic landscape of a cultural tourist scenic area of Guandi Temple in China with the aim of improving the linguistic landscape of the local tourism industry and upgrading the overall development of local tourism industry.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

All signs will be analyzed according to the following categories:

First, the production process is divided into top-down or bottom-up.

Second, sign types (monolingual, bilingual, trilingual, quadrilingual, and pentalingual).

Third, language types on signs (simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, English, French, Korean, and Japanese).

Fourth, language functions.

According to the code preference determined by the position of the text on the sign, that is, the left side is higher than the right side, the top is higher than the bottom, and the center is higher than the periphery.

This study focuses on the following two research questions:

(1) What are the overall characteristics of the linguistic landscape of the investigated Guandi Temple?

(2) What are the differences between "top-down" and "bottom-up" linguistic signage in the investigated Guandi Temple?

3.2 Research Subjects

At present, the cultural tourism scenic spot in Guan Gong's hometown has initially constructed three cultural relics tourism scenic spots: "Guandi Ancestral Temple in Xiezhou", "Guandi Family Temple in Changping" and "Guandi Ancestral Mausoleum in Changping". Given that the Guandi Ancestral Temple in Haizhou is at the core position of the entire large scenic spot and is a must-visit place for tourists, this study determines the scope of data collection as the Guandi Ancestral Temple in Haizhou and does not cover the other two scenic spots. The data for this study was collected in June 2024. During the collection process, only large-scale signs were photographed, such as scenic spot name signs, place-guidance signs, introduction signs, warning signs, store signs, billboards, etc. Signs with basically the same content and form were not repeatedly collected, and signs inside stores, scenic area offices and toilets were not considered.

In the end, a total of 324 signs were obtained, including 297 official signs and 27 private signs. Among the private signs, there are 16 store signs and 11 atypical language landscape signs. Subsequently, Excel spreadsheets were used to transcribe information such as language content, number of codes, and arrangement and combination methods on the

signs to facilitate statistical analysis.

3.3 Research Methods

This study adopts Shohamy's (2009) theory of "top-down" and "bottom-up" as the criteria for categorizing linguistic landscapes. "Top-down" refers to signs set up by the country or government agencies, while "bottom-up" refers to signs set up by individual social agents. Shohamy's delineation of the linguistic landscape category is broader and more in line with the fact that linguistic landscape in scenic areas are established by multiple organizations.

In addition, Scollon (2003) introduces the concept of geographical semiotics, which focuses on the location of signage and discourse, and what is the systems of social meaning produces in the physical world. Based on it, this study intends to interpret the linguistic landscape of Guandi Temple from the perspective of geographical semiotics. As geographical semiotics theory suggests that if more than two or more codes are used in signage, there will always be one code as the priority code and the rest of the languages as marginalized codes. Accordingly, it aims to explore the relationship between language, local culture and concerned parties, and therefore it reveals the complex social relationship behind the language.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Linguistic Landscape in the Scenic Area

Among the 324 signs, there were 295 "top-down" signs, accounting for 91.05% of the total number of signs, and 29 "bottom-up" signs, accounting for 8.95% of the total number of signs (See Table 1). The number of "top-down" linguistic signs is more than 10 times the number of "bottom-up" linguistic signs. Obviously, the "top-down" language signs are the main part of the linguistic landscape of the scenic spot. This also shows that the government institutions play a decisive role in the construction of the scenic area's linguistic landscape, highlighting the authority and importance of the official departments.

Table 1: Classification of Linguistic Signage in Scenic Area

Classification	Quantity (piece)	Percent (%)
Top-down	295	91.05
Bottom-up	29	8.95

4.1.1 The Varieties of Signs and Languages

According to the number of languages appearing on public signs, the tourism linguistic signs can be divided into four types, namely monolingual signs, bilingual signs, trilingual signs and quadrilingual signs. The distribution is shown in Table 2. It can be seen that monolingual signs in this tourist attraction account for the highest percentage, reaching 47.8%; trilingual signs are the second highest, reaching 26.5%; the percentage of bilingual signs is 14.8%; and the percentage of quadrilingual signs is the lowest, at 11.1%.

From the table, it is obvious that 52.8% of the language signs in the tourist attraction use two or more languages. This shows that the management of scenic spot as well as the relevant government departments have taken into account the needs of

foreign tourists to obtain information in the process of experiencing linguistic landscapes. It has played a certain degree of positive effect on foreign tourists visiting this scenic spot.

However, there is no doubt about the fact that the scenic area has the highest percentage of Chinese monolingual signs. It inevitably causes inconvenience to foreign tourists in understanding the history and culture of Guan Gong culture, as well as causes obstacle in the way of becoming an international tourist attraction in the world market.

Table 2: The Type of Language Signs in Scenic Spots

Number	Category	Quantity (piece)	Percent (%)
1	Monolingual Signs	155	47.8
2	Bilingual Signs	48	14.8
3	Trilingual Signs	86	26.5
4	Quadrilingual signs	36	11.1
Total		324	100

We found a total of four languages, Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean, on the language signage in the scenic area, and the specific information is shown in Table 3. It can be seen from the table that Chinese language appears in all 324 language signage with a frequency of 100%. There is no denying that Chinese is dominant in the linguistic landscape of Guandi Temple. Among the 324 Chinese signs, 298 language signs use simplified Chinese characters, accounting for 92% of the total number of signs. It can be seen that simplified Chinese characters are the main Chinese characters used today. The use of simplified Chinese characters as the main body of all kinds of language signs in the scenic area. It not only facilitates domestic Chinese tourists to better understand Guan Gong culture, but also conforms to the Law on Language and Writing in the public service industry in China.

Besides, 26 language signs use traditional Chinese characters, accounting for 8%. The use of traditional Chinese characters is regarded as a reflection of the long history of Guan Gong Culture. It can better immerse tourists in its local culture and to understand the history of this historic figure and his impact on religions in China in his afterlife.

What's more, English language appears in 169 signs, accounting for 52.2% of the total number of signs, which is the second language after Chinese in the scenic area. On the one hand, this highlights the importance of English as an international language and a global language; on the other hand, the presence of English on most of the language signs plays a great role in the promotion and popularization of English.

In addition to Chinese and English, Japanese and Korean also appear in these signs, accounting for 10.8% and 37.3% respectively. Considering the diversity of tourists' sources, the appearance of Japanese and Korean can provide overseas tourists from Japan and Korea with multiple language translations in order to provide better services.

Therefore, the four languages appearing in the linguistic landscape of the scenic spot, namely Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean, are better to cope with the diversified needs of inbound tourists with the present stage, and to a

certain extent, they have satisfied the needs of cultural dissemination of Guandi Temple.

Table 3: Language Frequency of Scenic Spot

Number	Category	Quantity (piece)	Percent (%)
1	Chinese	324	100
2	English	169	52.2
3	Japanese	35	10.8
4	Korean	121	37.3

4.1.2 The Functions of Languages

This study analyzes the functions played by different languages in the scenic linguistic landscape based on the theory of geographical semiotics proposed by Scollon & Scollon (2003). Geographical semiotics theory focuses on the location of signage and discourse, as well as the social meaning systems that are produced in the physical world. According to it, if a sign uses two or more codes, one code is always identified as the priority code and the others are marginalized. Generally speaking, the priority code is larger in font, more obvious in layout, and often located at the top, upper left or center of the sign. The marginalized codes are usually in smaller font size, distributed after the priority codes, and often located at the bottom, right or edge of the signage.

The Chinese language in the bilingual, trilingual or quadrilingual signs is located at the upper end of the sign, the center position, and the font is larger. Therefore, it is the priority language code, and plays the function of transmitting information. Next is English, which is usually followed by Chinese with a smaller font (See Figure 1); the same is true for Japanese and Korean, which tend to have smaller fonts and are located after the English font (See Figure 2). It can be concluded that English, Japanese and Korean belong to the marginalized code in the linguistic landscape of Guandi Temple.

Figure 1: Location Sign

Figure 2: Location Sign

4.2 Differences in Linguistic Varieties

The difference in language type refers to the most obvious difference between "top-down" and "bottom-up" signage. It was found that 55.6% (163 pieces) of the 295 "top-down" signs used a combination of Chinese + English, Chinese + English + Korean, and Chinese + English + Japanese + Korean, showing a strong tendency toward bilingualism and multilingualism (See Figure 3); while the 29 pieces of "bottom-up" signs used a combination of Chinese + English, Chinese + English + Korean, Chinese + English + Japanese + Korean, and Chinese + English + Japanese + Korean in their arrangement of characters. In the 29 pieces of "bottom-up"

signs, except for the English, Japanese and Korean translations of the store names, only one language is used, showing a strong monolingual tendency (See Figure 4). This finding is obviously different from the research results of existing linguistic landscapes at home and abroad.

It can be seen that, on the one hand, the single use of Chinese in the "bottom-up" signage reflects the fact that although Guan Gong's religious culture is a household name known to everyone, and the scenic spot and the government have been advocating to create an "international" tourism image, the actual degree of internationalization of the scenic spot is still very limited. On the other hand, it also highlights the fact that due to being located in an economically underdeveloped region, tourism agents have not fully realized the economic properties of language, and have neglected the strong economic value of multilingual signage in attracting consumers, and have not brought the economic value of multilingual language into full play.

Figure 3: Scenic Direction Sign

Figure 4: Scenic Shop Sign

5.   Findings and Discussion

5.1 Research Findings

5.1.1 Translation Quality

The translation quality still needs to be further improved to enhance the overall language environment of the scenic spot. For example, in the translation of "Guandi Tempel" in Figure 5, the correct expression should be "Guandi Temple". There is an obvious spelling mistake in the word "Tempel". Another example is "Fire Safety Tip" in Figure 6, it is obvious that ordinal number should be used, the expression "1th" is

obviously wrong, and the correct expression should be the "First".

Although the misspelling does not constitute an obstacle to understanding, the incorrect expression to some extend will cause confusion ad inconvenience to foreign tourists, consequently, hurting the cultural image of this tourist attraction as well as Guan Gong international image.
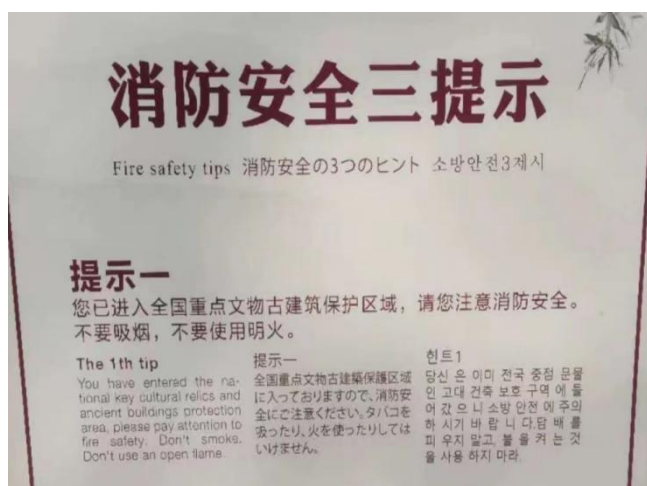

Figure 5: Scenic Sign

Figure 6: Fire Safety Tip Sign

As can be seen from the two signs placed on the front desk of the scenic area service hall - the signs of "Lei Feng Volunteer Service Station" and "Information Desk", below the Chinese characters are not English translations, but only the Chinese is written in pinyin, which are "XUELEIFENGZHIYUANFUWUZHAN" and "ZI XUN TAI" respectively. The former does not even separate the pinyin with spaces, which causes great difficulty in reading for foreign tourists. This kind of sign loses its basic information function and will only bring confusion and inconvenience to foreign tourists.

5.1.2 Names of the Scenic Spot

In addition to problems such as the need to improve the quality of translations and the lack of standardization of language and characters, there also exists an issue of inconsistent names of scenic spots. The survey found that on the sign of "China Xiezhou Guandi Ancestral Temple" in the scenic area, there are two versions of the pinyin annotation for the place name Xiezhou, namely "XIEZHOU" and "HAIZHOU". The inconsistency in the names of the same place where the Guandi Ancestral Temple located is likely to cause confusion and understanding obstacles for tourists, and is also not conducive to the external dissemination of the overall image of Guan Gong culture.

According to research, when "Xiezhou" is used as a place name, the pronunciation should be "hài zhōu". The main reason is that since ancient times, the local dialect has pronounced "Xie" as "hài". This pronunciation has been passed down through generations and has become a fixed pronunciation habit. To a certain extent, it has also affected the official pronunciation of place names. Given that dialects are an important part of regional culture, they reflect the language habits and cultural characteristics of the local people and represent the unique history and cultural heritage of this land, with a strong sense of cultural identity. Therefore, this cultural identity also enables this pronunciation to be continued and passed down.

In conclusion, although the cultural tourism scenic spot in Guan Gong's hometown has developed over many years and has already realized the importance of language landscape for enhancing the scenic spot's image, enhancing tourists' experience, promoting the development of the scenic spot and spreading Guan Gong culture, however, according to the data presentation of this empirical investigation, the language landscape construction in the scenic spot still lacks overall planning to a certain extent.

5.2 The Development Strategies

5.2.1 Regulate Linguistic Landscape

First of all, the management committee of Guandi Temple should organize researchers and experts to investigate and proof check verbal signs regularly as well as provide professional suggestions where any mistakes or errors happen.

Secondly, this study suggests to improve the design of the bottom-up signage to enhance its compatibility with the scenic spot. The administrative committee can formulate a unified standard for the linguistic landscape, publicize the importance of the linguistic landscape to the individual business to optimize the design of the language signage and highlight their own characteristics, so as to enrich the diversity of the linguistic landscape and enhance the overall vitality of the scenic spot.

5.2.2 Promote Multimodal Linguistic Landscape

In the linguistic landscape construction of the investigated scenic area, multimodality has been well practiced. For example, electronic screens are installed in different locations in the scenic area to display public information, tourist notices, pilgrim information and blessing contents in real time in a multimodal form of text, pictures, music and animations. Among them, there is a large interactive electronic guide screen. Tourists can click the corresponding scenic spot icon or touch the screen to obtain detailed information about the scenic spot, such as recommended tourist routes in the scenic area, detailed architectural drawings of the Guandi Temple,

the distribution overview of Guandi Temples across the country and even the world, the on-site situation of Guan Gong sacrifice ceremonies in various places, and the exhibition of the statue of Guan Di, etc. The use of touch screens breaks the previous concept of one-way information transmission of signs and truly realizes the interaction between tourists and scenic spots. Applying different modalities such as text, pictures and videos to the language landscape constitutes a multimodal language landscape.

Effective multimedia symbol landscape design can make the long history become fashionable and diverse, maximize the historical value and contemporary value of Guan Gong culture, and highlight the integration and innovation of Yuncheng Guandi Ancestral Temple in the development history of Guan Gong culture. Therefore, scenic spots should attach importance to the status of multimodal language landscape in tourist scenic spots, adopt new methods and new technologies, and innovate the local Guan Gong culture communication and promotion system.

5.2.3 Integrate Regional Cultural Symbols

This study suggests integrating local cultural symbols into the language signs to establish Guan Gong specific cultural image of "loyalty", "righteousness", "benevolence", and "courage". In addition, this study also suggests that the management committee should cooperate with local universities to make full use of the resources and talents, and provide tourism industry with a new way of publicity.

During the investigation, it was found that a series of signs on the outer wall at the exit of the Guandi Temple present the specific connotations of the core socialist values one by one in the form of text on the left and pictures on the right. However, neither the text nor the pictures are directly related to the history of Guan Gong or Guan Gong culture, resulting in a lack of cultural characteristics of the scenic spot. Therefore, this paper suggests organically incorporating the current elements of the spirit of the times in China into language signs to highlight the characteristics and innovation of the scenic spot.

Guan Gong culture is rich in connotations. "Loyalty, righteousness, benevolence, courage, propriety, wisdom and trust" is a highly condensed expression of Guan Gong's spirit. It has internal connections and similarities with the core socialist values at the national, social and individual levels. When designing the language landscape of scenic spots, we can start from aspects such as content, style design and layout to integrate Guan Gong's spirit with the core socialist values. In this way, while inheriting and promoting Guan Gong's spirit, it can also provide beneficial cultural support and spiritual motivation for practicing the core socialist values.

In addition, the linguistic landscape can integrate more and better regional cultural symbols to enhance the cultural taste of scenic spots and enable tourists to deeply feel the charm of local regional culture. For example, merchants can integrate elements such as local historical culture and folk customs according to their own business characteristics, and combine modern design concepts and technical means to create language signs with characteristics and connotations. This can

not only improve their own market competitiveness, attract the attention of tourists and achieve economic goals, but also enrich the linguistic landscape of scenic spots as well as enhance the tourism image of scenic spots.

6. Conclusion

This study carried out an empirical examination of the status quo of the linguistic landscape of Guandi Temple in Shanxi Province in China. After coding and interpreting the code, the following conclusions were drawn.

First, most of the language signs use two or more languages, and a small number of signs use only Chinese. Secondly, there are four language codes in the scenic area: Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean. Among them, Chinese, as the priority language code, mainly plays the information function and is responsible for conveying information to tourists. While English, Japanese and Korean belong to the marginalized code, mainly playing a symbolic function, highlighting the "internationality" and "diversity" of languages in Guandi Temple. Thirdly, analyzing from both "top-down" and "bottom-up" perspectives, it is also found that the most obvious differences are reflected in the language types and signage design. The "top-down" signs are set up by the scenic spots and the government, which show a strong bilingual and multilingual tendency, while the "bottom-up" signs are set up by individual businesses, which show a strong monolingual tendency. Fourthly, from the point of view of appearance, "top-down" signs are beautiful and uniform, while "bottom-up" signs are diverse and crude. Fifthly, after analyzing the specific content of the linguistic landscape, it could be seen that the linguistic landscape of the scenic spot has problems such as uneven quality of translations, non-standardized use of language, and lack of overall planning of the linguistic landscape.

Based on the above problems, this study puts forward the following suggestions: First, the management committee of Guandi Temple should take into account the diversity of the tourists' source countries; secondly, the "top-down" signage should be integrated into the local cultural elements. Thirdly, the "bottom-up" signage should increase the number of languages other than Chinese to improve the service capacity so as to better utilize the economic value of the linguistic landscape and promote the Guan Gong culture to the world market.

Acknowledgement

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