The ordinary semiotic landscape of an unordinary place: Spatiotemporal disjunctures in Incheon's Chinatown

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This article examines the semiotic landscape of the Chinatown in Incheon, South Korea. Using the geosemiotic framework as a heuristic guide, we analyze how the spectacle of Chinatown is constituted through spatial, linguistic, semiotic, and material resources, and find that the unordinariness of the place is contingent on and emerges through its juxtaposition with ordinary space, practice, and language use. We suggest this apparent paradox can be understood through the process of scaling, during which signs and practices that might have been considered quotidian become monumentalised and ritualised when they are transported across timescales and spatial scales. Incheon's Chinatown then affords an opportunity to understand the semiotic and material production of 'unordinariness' through 'ordinariness'. These collective spatiotemporal disjunctures or juxtapositions reveal unexpected but nonetheless crucial intersections among language, semiotics, and nationness.

Keywords: translinguistics, geosemiotics, space, Chinatown, Korea

Introduction

The city of Incheon in Korea was established in 1883 as a trade port with China and thrived as a Chinese settlement until the 1960s, when it experienced a rapid decline. In the wake of the Asian financial crisis in the 1990s, resulting in Korean's IMF (International Monetary Fund) bailout in 1997 (Kim, S. S., 2000), the investment in and development of 'new' Chinatowns was pursued as one means to promote economic growth in Korea and across Asia (Eom, 2017). The 'old' Chinatown of Incheon, in Jung-gu (Jung District), was not viewed as a viable option for capital investment and, according to transnational developers, was ideal for only 'small shops and restaurants' whose economy would center on 'low-paid workers and petty merchants', because of its hilly geography and limited space (Eom, 2017, pp. 707–708). In 2005, a 'new' Chinatown was developed in Song-do in the nearby Yeonsu-gu of Incheon, with tax incentives designed to attract overseas investors (Eom, 2017).[1] Meanwhile, in 2002, in the space of the 'old' Chinatown

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[1] As of 2018, it can be argued that the 'new' Chinatown of Song-do has not lived up to expectations. It has even been characterized as a 'ghost city' (Jeon, forthcoming; on other Chinatowns as 'ghost cities', also see Yu, 2014).

in Jung-gu, the local government established the country's first official Chinatown in an effort to create a tourist destination. Neither the 'old' nor 'new' are actually populated by a significant percentage of Chinese residents, and other regions, such as Garibong-dong of the Guro-gu of Seoul, have higher concentration of Chinese-Koreans (Lee, Y., 2009),[2] even though they are not 'officially' designated as Chinatowns. While there is an absence of a Chinese residential population and consequently of a vibrant community life, the reinvention of the 'old' Chinatown in Incheon relies heavily on buildings, facades, and signage—in other words, material, semiotic, and linguistic resources that characterise Chinatowns around the world. It is marked as distinctively non-Korean yet shaped linguistically and culturally by the larger Korean context around it.

On the surface, this spectacle of Chinatown appears to be the opposite of 'ordinariness'—the theme of this special issue. It is 'unordinary' in the sense that it is marked as conspicuously 'different' from the rest of Korea and thus 'unordinary' to local Koreans. It is also 'unordinary' in that the concept of a 'Chinatown' does not exist in China proper, and as such it is potentially 'unordinary' to Chinese who visit Korea. Finally, it might therefore be argued that it is perhaps 'unordinary' in the sense that, because of the conspicuousness of its linguistic, visual, and architectural features, it is an 'unordinary' experience more universally, not dependent on a particular cultural background or geopolitical vantage point. However, by examining the semiotic landscape of Incheon Chinatown more closely using the geosemiotic framework (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), we demonstrate the dialogical relationship between the spectacular and the banal, for it is the play between these two conditions that enables the production of a 'Chinatown' to begin with. In this framework, Chinatown is viewed as a geosemiotic aggregate, composed of visual semiotics (e.g., signage and facade), place semiotics (e.g., architecture and layout), and interaction order (e.g., communicative practices in place). In each of these aspects, we examine how 'ordinary' material and semiotic resources become 'unordinary'. This spatial study of 'translingual ordinariness' also offers us an opportunity to reflect on the broader conditions under which 'language' and 'nation',

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[2] In fact, Garibong-dong is the setting of *Beomjoedosi*, or *The Outlaws*, the 2017 crime action film about Chinese gangsters in Korea. Considering the reputation of Chinese-Korean areas, such as Garibong-dong, to be associated with criminal activity, perhaps the Jung-gu Chinatown is not so much an effort to revitalize an 'old' Chinatown as it is an effort to manufacture a 'good' Chinatown.

which operate as epistemological points of departure for translinguistic thought, can be rendered legible in the first place.

Translinguistics, semiotic landscape, and the legibility of nation

Translinguistics can be understood as an orientation to language and communication that recognises the fluidity of linguistic boundaries (Canagarajah, 2013, 2018; Dovchin, 2017a, b, 2018; Dovchin, Pennycook, & Sultana, 2017; García, 2009; García & Li, 2014; Jacquemet, 2005, 2013; Jørgensen, 2008; Jørgensen & Møller, 2014; Lee, J. W., 2018; Li, 2011; Li & Zhu, 2013; Pennycook, 2007, 2010; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Sultana, Dovchin, & Pennycook, 2015). A critical precursor to translinguistic thought is found in the work of Bauman and Briggs (2003), who describe the 'metadiscursive regimes of language' through which linguistic and discursive categories were established and stratified. In response to Chakrabarty's (2000) call to 'provincialise Europe', Bauman and Briggs remind readers that various conceptual categories of human communication, along with their derivative hierarchies, are inventions of Eurocentric thought, including European philology. Developing this critical line of inquiry, Makoni and Pennycook (2005) call for a 'disinvention' of language as such, moving away from ostensibly fixed categories between one language and another in order to 'reconstitute' them otherwise. Indeed, in the analysis below, we will explore how the assumed transposability between Korean and other 'languages' was put into crisis by the need to create separate linguistic and national categories in the project of reinventing Chinatown.

This being noted, while translinguistics is premised on a deviation from named 'languages' as such, it is crucially also about transcending the assumed potential of 'language' itself, especially in terms of the assumed primacy or centrality of language to communication. In other words, it reflects a paradigm of communication that understands 'linguistic' communication as complementary to a range of 'non-linguistic' resources, including semiotic and material resources present in the same space as language(s) themselves. Pennycook (2007) for instance, calls for a 'transmodal' paradigm of communication that does not assume meaning-making practices happening within discrete modes but in accordance with their discursive interdependence. Pennycook (2010) and Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) foreground the role of language in the production of social space, while Li (2011), in his description of 'translanguaging space', emphasises the conduciveness of space to the availability of particular

kinds of language resources in translingual practice. In short, translinguistics situates the analysis of the functions and capacities of 'language' within a wide range of 'spatial repertoires' (Canagarajah, 2013, 2018).

This spatial orientation in translinguistics thus affords a logical connection to research on semiotic landscapes (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). The concept of linguistic landscape, as often attributed to the seminal work by Landry and Bourhis (1997), refers to the study of public language artifacts, such as street signage and commercial shop signs, as reflective of the vitality of a given ethnolinguistic group. Meanwhile, semiotic landscape, as conceptualised by Jaworski and Thurlow (2010), reflects the significance of a wider range of semiotic and material resources, beyond language itself, in the social production of space. Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) thus refer to the semiotic landscape as 'any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making' (p. 2). While acknowledging the potential for a translinguistic approach to an analysis of the semiotic landscape, we do not merely wish to foreground the types of translingual practice in public space. Instead, analogous to how translinguistic inquiry can call into question the assumed unordinariness of translingual practice itself, we contend that a translinguistic approach to semiotic landscape can lead to productive inquiry into the conditions by which not only linguistic 'difference' but also semiotic and material 'differences' are utilised as resources for place-making.

Furthermore, the translingual landscape of Incheon Chinatown, as a redeveloped historical ethnic settlement, provides an opportunity to understand how nationness (both Chinese and Korean) comes to be rendered legible in 'unexpected places' (Heller, 2007; Pennycook, 2012). This focus on 'nationness' foregrounds Bhabha's (1994) theorisation of nation as 'narration'. According to Bhabha (1994), any national imaginary (Anderson, 1991) is but a 'narrative strategy' that 'produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or "cultural difference" in the act of writing the nation' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 201). As Bhabha (1994) argues, in spite of the inherent instability and impossibility of 'nation' as a reliable cultural category, it is discursively reproduced and sustained through various acts of narration, such as literary works. For instance, an author can deploy a protagonist who allegorises the nation, or can provide incidental juxtapositions to another nation, which in turn produces 'national'

categories such as 'America' or 'China' (p. 201). The latter strategy is especially relevant to our understanding of legibility of Chineseness in the Incheon Chinatown, for Chineseness is always necessarily in contention with the broader sociocultural milieu of 'Korea'. Koreanness operates through inconspicuous or 'banal' (Billig, 1995) means within Korea, except in designated tourist traps, such as Itaewon or Insadong, which are characterized by an 'unbanality', or excess, of Koreanness (Lee, J. W., 2017). Likewise, as we will demonstrate in the analysis below, the linguistic, semiotic, and spatial features of Incheon's Chinatown create an unordinary place by juxtaposing a spectacular display of Chineseness with the quotidian manifestation of a globalised Korea.

Through the geosemiotic lens

Based on photographs and ethnographic notes taken by the first author in 2016, as part of a larger ongoing ethnographic study of the semiotic and spatial features of global Korea, the analysis in this paper examines how languages and other semiotic and material means are used to construct Chinese and Korean nationness within the space of Incheon Chinatown by adopting a geosemiotic framework (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). Geosemiotics refers to 'the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world' (p. 2), in which the meaning of a place is conceptualised as a dialogical interaction among three main semiotic systems: place semiotics, visual semiotics, and interaction order.

As the first component of geosemiotics, *place semiotics* is coined by Scollon and Scollon in order to connect the studies of micro-level social interaction and language use with research on social space. It is concerned with the meaning system of spatial organization, and it includes a typology of spaces according to their uses, for example, frontstage versus backstage, private versus public, display space versus passage space. We also include here five sensory spaces as defined by Hall (1966). Inversely defined as 'the huge aggregation of semiotic systems which are not located in the persons of the social actors or in the framed artifacts of visual semiotics' (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 8), *place semiotics* underscores the importance of considering space not simply as the context of language use but also a semiotic vehicle in itself.

The second component system in the geosemiotic framework we will analyse is *visual semiotics*, defined as 'the ways in which pictures (signs, images, graphics, texts, photographs, paintings, and all of the other combinations of these and others) are produced as meaningful wholes for visual interpretation' (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 8). In our analysis, this would also include other visual characteristics of signs, such as code preference, inscription, and emplacement, moved from place semiotics in Scollon and Scollon's original framework (see pp. 20–21), because these characteristics are intrinsic to the visual display of language.

The third semiotic system in the framework is *interaction order*, a term Scollon and Scollon (2003) borrowed from Goffman (1959) but also expanded to include any analytical tools concerned with 'the current, ongoing, ratified (but also contested and denied) set of social relationships we take up and try to maintain with the other people who are in our presence' (p. 16). As Scollon and Scollon remind us, it is important to recognise *interaction orders* also as semiotic signs, which 'give off' (Goffman, 1959) social information of social actors. In addition to these 'units of interaction order', Scollon and Scollon include the five types of perceptual spaces developed by Hall (1966), which in our analysis will be moved under *place semiotics*, the first component. A modified outline of geosemiotics and its component systems is presented in Table 1 below (see Lou, 2014, 2016a, 2017 for other applications of this modified geosemiotic framework).

Geosemiotics

Interaction order:	Visual semiotics:	Place semiotics:
1. Interpersonal distance (intimate, personal, social, public)	1. Pictures (represented participants modality, composition, interactive participants)	1. Perceptual spaces [moved from *interaction order*] (visual, auditory, olfactory, thermal, haptic)
2. Personal front (appearance, behavior)	2. Material aspects of visual semiotics [moved from *place semiotics*] (code preference, inscription, emplacement)	2. Use spaces (frontage or public (exhibit/display, passage, special use, secure), backstage or private, regulatory spaces (vehicle traffic, pedestrian traffic, public notice), commercial space (e.g., holiday market), transgressive space (e.g., homeless hangouts))
3. Units of interaction order (single, with, file or procession, queue, contact, service encounter, conversational encounter, meeting, people-processing encounter (interview, screening, examination), platform event, celebrative occasion)		

Table 1: Modified outline of geosemiotics based on Scollon & Scollon (2003, pp. 20–21)

In the following analysis, we examine each of the three aspects forming the geosemiotic aggregate of Incheon Chinatown and discuss how the interaction among them transforms a historical ethnic enclave into a tourist destination, reinforcing linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries. While each section focuses on one of the three dimensions, moving from place semiotics, to visual semiotics, and to interaction order, we would like to emphasize that they are followed as a heuristic guide as intended by Scollon and Scollon (2003) and inevitably overlap across the analytical categories.

Juxtaposing the unordinary and ordinary: Place semiotics in Chinatown

One of the most prominent features of any Chinatown, whether in San Francisco, Yokohama, or London, is the main archway, or *paifang*. Combining influences from ancient Indian and Chinese vernacular architecture, *paifangs* have been speculated to have originated in the Zhou Dynasty, about 2,000 years ago, and have mainly served memorial functions in China until the late 19th century, with the inscriptions often extolling moral virtues, commending achievements, or offering prayers (Wang & Duang, 2016). A *paifang* decidedly symbolises traditional Chinese architecture, and new *paifangs* have rarely been built in China since the end of 19th century. However, their construction continued in Chinatowns around the world, with the one in Washington, DC's Chinatown claiming to be the largest. Funding for such projects often came from both local municipal governments and Chinese governments at respective levels. The Friendship Archway in Washington, DC was a joint venture between Washington, DC and Beijing, the capital cities of two superpowers in the 1980s. The archway in Incheon was built in 2000, with funding from the Chinese city of Weiha, as part of the Incheon government's efforts to revitalise this historic area (Eom, 2017).

The Incheon Chinatown features four archways, the main one at the South entrance, one each on the West and East entrances, and another to the North, serving as the entrance to Jayu Park, a park that features serene walking trails for visitors (see Figure 1). The main archway for the South entrance is an extravagant design with four pillars, creating a primary entryway of about 6.5 meters wide and two peripheral entryways of approximately 3 meters wide each (see Figure 2). It features three full pagoda-style eaves and two half-eaves. Each full eave features the 12 Chinese zodiac animals, while each of the half-eaves features 6 animals. The archway is approximately 11 meters tall and 16 meters wide. The golden inscription in the central banner reads 'China Street', presented in the traditional reading path from right to left and written in Traditional Chinese characters, completed with the signature of the calligrapher, again a feature of entrances into traditional Chinese houses. This modern traditional *paifang* thus exemplifies what Hobsbawm (1983) calls 'invented traditions', which foreground the role of state ideologues and functionaries in the manufacturing of heritage for the purposes of facilitating nationalist sentiment and ideological allegiance. It commemorates the nation

rather than its subjects (albeit under a different nation then), who migrated from their country to settle in Korea more than a hundred years prior (Kim, K., 2004).

A comparison of photographs of the archway taken in 2016 and 2015 provides an even starker juxtaposition. The photograph taken in June 2015 (an archived image from Google Maps) shows the archway in its bare concrete state, with only the Chinese characters painted in red lacquer (see Figure 3). Blommaert (2015) emphasises the importance of attending to the semiotic landscape not only as a series of achronic, static artifacts but as chronicling semiosis across time. In our case, such an approach is made possible by not only knowledge of the recent construction date (Year 2000) of the archway but also the serendipitous availability of an archived photograph of the archway from 2015, which is in turn juxtaposed with the image taken during field research in 2016. This miniature 'knowledge archive' (Blommaert & Dong, 2010) enables us to document the invention of tradition through not merely the production of the archway but also its subsequent ornamentation into a monument of excess, or 'unbanality' (Lee, J. W., 2017; Lou, 2016b). This possibility was enabled by the serendipitous timing of the field research, which allowed us to document the invention of tradition-in-progress, as it were, through the image of workers painting the buildings to the left of the archway with red in an effort to reinforce Chineseness (see Figure 4). One of the most notable features of the Incheon Chinatown is the excessive use of red, a colour typically associated with Chinese culture (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). If the 'invention' of nation is made possible through the invention of tradition, as argued by Hobsbawm (1983), then the use of red is, in the context of the Chinatown, one such effort to resemiotise the space as 'traditionally' Chinese. It is, of course, not to suggest that there is anything inherently Chinese about the colour red. Our point is that red comes to be legible as indexing Chineseness in Incheon through its excessive and conspicuous usage in the Chinatown in an effort to resemiotise, or indeed 'invent', the space as 'authentically' Chinese, an effort which is premised on the possibility of an 'authentic' Chineseness outside of or prior to its *narration*.

Located on four sides of Chinatown, the *paifangs* also have the function of demarcating the Chinatown as a space of 'difference' within the Korean city. Along with tourist maps near the arches, they serve to foreclose undesignated and unintended use of the Chinatown. Chinatown is then turned into 'exhibit-display spaces' and 'passage spaces', per Scollon and Scollon's (2003) place semiotics. They direct visitors to enter Chinatown and, upon exiting,

visitors are informed of their egress, or their 'return' to Korea. Meanwhile, the maps not only serve to facilitate navigation but also to differentiate the space semiotically as a discrete space of Chineseness by, for example, visually contrasting the architectural styles of ornate Chinese tiled roofs inside Chinatown with modern buildings, such as the police station located just outside it.

Intriguingly, within the borders of Chinatown as delineated by the *paifangs*, we also found diverse uses of space. The incongruity is most noticeable in the presence of the Fairy Tale Town, an area in Chinatown in which the buildings are decorated with Japanese anime characters in pastel colours (Figure 5), invoking a childish space, similar to the Disneyland discussed by Baudrillard (1994), a simulacrum of Los Angeles's everyday consumerist life. But here, the Fairy Tale Town has no apparent connection to Chinatown at all. Instead it reminds us of indoor children's playgrounds and video game arcades that are a quite common scene in many East Asian cities—in other words, it is a rather 'ordinary' space in the globalised urban landscape. As de Certeau (1984) argues, in spite of top-down efforts by institutional apparatuses to assign names to social space, the nominal value of such designations are reimagined bottom-up by everyday users of the space: 'Disposed in constellations that hierarchise and semantically order the city, operating arrangements and historical justifications, [street names] slowly lose like worn coins, the value engraved on them, but their ability to signify outlives its first definition' (p. 104). The seemingly incongruent presence of the Fairy Tale Town then could be seen as one of such unexpected spatial practice, contradicting the officially intended 'Chineseness' of the space. At the same time, this ordinary space for children's play holds up like a mirror to the simulacrum of Chinatown, reminding us that the unordinary space itself is a sign of a place and time that exists only in moments of discursive imagination.

Re-indexing Chinese as the Other: The visual semiotics of translingualism

In Paek's (2016) analysis of paintings of street signage in Seoul, it is argued that attention to seemingly minor details such as the size and alignment of text can lead to productive inquiry into the 'tension between the ordinary and extraordinary' (p. 232). For instance, through an analysis of paintings of the Seoul cityscape by French artist Manoël Pillard, Paek (2016) argues that the

artistic rendition of something mundane such as street signage, which is familiar and ordinary to most Koreans, is able to be viewed 'anew with wonder and curiosity' (p. 234). In the analysis above, we observed a similar juxtaposition of the unordinary and ordinary in the place semiotics of Incheon Chinatown. In this section, we turn our attention toward how the juxtaposition plays out in the visual semiotics of Chinatown's linguistic landscape, paying particular attention to the 'emplacement' (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), the physical location, and the material means of multilingual display.

While in the visual survey, the frequency of Chinese in the linguistic landscape is lower than that of Korean, wherever it occurs, it appears significantly more prominent both visually and materially. The restaurant signs in the Chinatown frequently feature Chinese names in much larger size than Korean or English words (see Figure 6). The high contrast between the red background and yellow or white font colours also affords them a greater salience, even when viewed from a distance. Both of the main buildings in front of the viewer repeat the restaurant names three times on the top, middle, and ground floors. It would be convenient to suggest that the Chinese serves a more symbolic function, while the Korean a pragmatic choice, as can be seen in the much smaller yellow road sign to the right of the same building. We would like to suggest a more spatial reading of this dichotomy by situating it not only in the spatial context of Incheon Chinatown but also in the history of language ideologies and policies in Korea more broadly.

It is important to note here that the Chinatown in Incheon is situated in a very different linguistic ecology from other Chinatowns, especially those in the English-speaking world. Prior to the invention of Hangeul by King Sejong (1397–1450) of the Joseon Dynasty, Koreans did not have their own script and relied exclusively on the Chinese writing system. Today, while the use of Chinese characters and loanwords from other languages (especially Japanese and English) is quite common, there is an active movement toward language 'purification', attempting to ban the use of loanwords and even Chinese characters. Yet, what is curious is the fact that Hangeul was not actively promoted as a national script until the 20th century, in the years during and immediately following colonial occupation by the Japanese (Jung, 2012; Suh, 2013). In other words, the use of Chinese to signify Chineseness, such as in the case of Chinatown, is a relatively recent phenomenon, involving a gradual re-indexing of both languages to two distinctive geopolitical identities. Meanwhile, the use of English has come to index modernity

and cosmopolitanism (Lee, J. S., 2006; Park & Abelmann, 2004), especially in the context of South Korea.

This history of shifting language ideologies and policies informs our visual semiotic analysis of the three 'languages' in the linguistic landscape of Incheon Chinatown. Drawing on the concept of 'emplacement' (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), we can observe that the visual prominence of each language varies across unordinary and ordinary spaces, as we have discussed in the previous section. The Chinese inscription '中華街 (Chinese Street)', for example, is only found on the main archway, whereas the less spectacular side arches are inscribed in Korean and English (Figure 7), where even the Korean words for Chinatown '차이나타운' are in fact a transliteration of 'Chinatown' in English. Banners for events and exhibitions are written almost exclusively in Korean (Figure 8), while English dominates the signs for ostensibly modern global establishments, such as cafés and convenience stores (Figure 9). The mapping of different languages onto respective spatial domains within Chinatown both physically and symbolically re-indexes Chinese as the Other, simultaneously erasing its role from the linguistic history of Korea and reinforcing contemporary Korean nationness by linking it with hybrid use of Hangeul script and English words.

Scaling ordinariness: The performance of interaction orders

While some history is erased or downplayed, other histories are elevated and made more visible for the purpose of inventing tradition. Rather curiously, the object that has come to symbolise everyday life in the history of Incheon Chinatown is *jajangmyeon*, a noodle dish with black bean sauce. One of the primary attractions of Incheon Chinatown is in fact the Jajangmyeon Museum, at the site of the original Gonghwachun restaurant. The Chinese restaurant, opened in 1905, was the first in Korea that served the now globally popular noodle dish. A bowl of jajangmyeon was considered an expensive dish until the 1960s, when the Korean government, after investigating the consumer price index, mandated lower prices, which made the dish more accessible to a wider consumer base. Today, jajangmyeon is considered a central part of Korean food culture and 'closely related with Korean identity' (Yang, 2005, p. 75). It is thus not surprising that this

ordinary noodle dish is monumentalised in Incheon Chinatown, as it serves to accentuate Koreanness while maintaining a historical connection to Chinese immigration into the country.

In the Jajangmyeon Museum, visitors can encounter a series of authentic artifacts from the turn of the century, such as woks in which jajangmyeon was made. Moreover, life-size plaster sculptures of human figures (e.g., cooks, hawkers, and customers) are placed along with objects and photographs to recreate the everyday contexts in which the noodle was made, sold, delivered, or consumed. Visitors can even enter the scene by sharing a table with the plaster models (see Figure 10), permanently suspended in the action of enjoying the noodle, with chopsticks in hand. The re-enactments of these street and restaurant scenes in the museum not only provide photo ops for the visitors, but they also turn ordinary interaction orders (e.g., sharing a table with strangers in a noodle restaurant) into a spectacle and turn the 'use space' of the restaurant into a 'display space' or 'performance space'.

Another curious feature in the Jajangmyeon Museum is a display of packages of 56 different instant jajangmyeon brands. The purpose of this display, of course, is to document the cultural influence of jajangmyeon as an everyday phenomenon in Korea, easily accessible within minutes and at a very low price. However, in the same way that translinguistics demands a reconsideration of sedimented social 'realities', such as the boundaries between one named language and another, the emplacement (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) of the instant jajangmyeon at the Jajangmyeon Museum, a space designated to celebrate the history of jajangmyeon and its quotidian iterations through instant jajangmyeon, calls upon one to recognise the larger context of its history. As an ordinary object of everyday life, instant jajangmyeon is simply consumed without much thought to the origins of its innovation. However, because it is encountered specifically in a museum, a space that is, at least in theory, devoted to the maintenance of historical fact, it is especially curious to recognise that instant noodles are themselves a Japanese invention (Japan Instant Food Industry Association, n.d.). Our purpose, to be sure, is not to arbitrarily valorise 'authenticity' for the sake of authenticity. In the context of transnational food studies, Ku (2014) argues that authenticity is merely a 'discursive strategy for making sense of and coping with the world as it is' (p. 35). Following this line of reasoning, we are not merely trying to point out that instant jajangmyeon is indebted to the culinary entrepreneurship of the Japanese. Instead, it to underscore the impossibility of celebrating innovation in food culture, and perhaps innovation more generally, through the rubric of 'nation'. It is a reminder, in other

words, of the challenges of constructing the historical contributions of a particular 'national imaginary', and, most significantly, a reminder that it is in an exceptional space, such as Chinatown, that we are most likely to encounter such narratives of 'national' history, embedded within the historical narrative of transnational immigration.

Conclusions

Our initial analysis of the semiotic landscape of Incheon Chinatown approached it as a space of visually conspicuous translingual excess, a linguistic and cultural spectacle, which is characteristic of Chinatowns worldwide as a 'ritual place' (Lou, 2016a). However, by applying Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotic framework to examine more closely its place semiotics, visual semiotics, and interaction order, we have reached a paradox in our conclusion—that is, the unordinariness of Chinatown itself is mutually constituted by ordinary architecture, signs, languages, and objects.

The significance of the social semiotic strategies that constitute this Chinatown can be understood through the heuristic of scale (Blommaert, 2010; Carr & Lempert, 2016). While we acknowledge Carr and Lempert's (2016) warnings against establishing a concrete, and thus exclusionary, definition of scale, for our purposes, we define it as the discursive strategy by which objects and phenomena are described and conceptualized in relation to other interscalar objects or phenomena. For instance, scaling enables us to understand the age of the human species in relation to the age of the planet Earth: if Earth were 24 hours old, humans would have been on the planet for a mere 2 seconds. Significantly, scalar work is by no means ideologically neutral, and it can be used for a variety of not only representational but also persuasive purposes (Carr & Lempert, 2016). Our purpose in deploying the heuristic of scale is to make sense of various paradoxes in the geosemiotic aggregate of Incheon Chinatown. On the most obvious level, it raises the question of being able to consolidate Chineseness to merely one 'Chinatown' or even particular elements that are ostensibly representative of China, such as the colour red, as noted above. This practice of down-scaling, for the purposes of representational facility, raises the question of what elements of the ordinary, everyday lives of Chinese migrants in Korean have invariably been neglected, or perhaps need to be neglected, through the very attempt to represent Chineseness in Chinatown through merely conspicuous means.

Incheon's Chinatown affords an opportunity to understand the semiotic and material production of 'unordinariness' through 'ordinariness'. For one, it is a translingual space in that it is constituted by a constellation of both discrete and fluid resources from Chinese, Korean, and English. Further, the juxtaposition of the old (e.g., historic buildings and relics) and the new (e.g., modern establishments, such as cafés and convenience stores) and of the 'local' (Korean), the 'foreign' (Chinese), and the 'global' (English) results in a spatiotemporal disjuncture that invites the question of what roles touristic and Orientalist gazes play in the shaping of nationness and, in particular, 'Korean' and 'Chinese' nationness by recreating the history and the space of transnational migration. These collective spatiotemporal disjunctures reveal unexpected but nonetheless crucial intersections among language, semiotics, and nationness. More specifically, a space like Korea's Chinatown offers insights into how boundaries between 'languages' and between 'nations' were resurrected through linguistic, visual, and material means in the service of place-making.

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