

## The Commodification of English Language in Chinese Tourism: A Case Study of the Palace Museum

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### ABSTRACT

*Based on an empirical case study in the Palace Museum in Beijing, China, this article sketches out the functional usefulness of the English language from an economic perspective, providing an empirical estimation of the economic values of English in the linguistic landscape of the Chinese tourism marketplace. It develops a topical understanding of the commodification of the English language by taking into consideration both the English language as a commodity and the process of English language commodification. Research data were gathered from a number of sources, including English introductory signboards on-site, questionnaire surveys, and interviews. Analysis shows that three major dimensions of economic value could be detected from the use of English in the Palace Museum: the communicative value, the informative value, and the symbolic value. While this study contributes a socioeconomic perspective to the English language in the Chinese tourism context, it could shed light on the adoption and economic values of the English language in similar contexts in the world.*

*Keywords: English; language as a commodity; language commodification; Chinese tourism; Palace Museum*

### INTRODUCTION

Drawing on premises of language economies – particularly on Bourdieu's (1991) concepts of "linguistic market" and "linguistic capital", the term "commodification" has entered the sociolinguistic lexicon with great force in recent years to capture the situation whereby language has become essential components of today's globalised new economy (Block et al., 2012). Following the socio-economic development, language has increasingly been conceived as a source of capital—it has become "commodified" and exchangeable for material goods and benefits. While the neoliberal market has increased the market value of indigenous and minority languages, overall, the main beneficiary is the dominant language of English, with its multifunctionality in the cross-cultural economy of today's world (Cameron, 2012; Yin & Vine, 2022).

The issue of language commodification is especially relevant in the tourism context, whereby communication constructs a major part of the commodity to be sold. In tourism, language operates not only as a sign of a specific local culture but also represents one commodity among others that facilitates the incorporation of certain types of cultural and social meanings into a globalised symbolic economy (Jaworski & Piller, 2008; Zukin, 1995). Following this trend, a number of recent studies have opened up a perspective that is intrinsically tied up with the logic of language commodification in a tourism context, and an increasing number of applied linguists have turned their attention to the linkage between tourism economies and language practices (e.g. Xiao, 2017; Xiao & Lee, 2022; Heller, Jaworski & Thurlow, 2014; Wilson et. al, 2023).

In the meantime, while the value of language for material gains is perceived widely in the linguistic market of tourism, most of the extant literature on language commodification in tourism studies is conducted with a focus on indigenous languages as connected to local traits and regional identities, leaving the dominant market of the English language, as the touristic lingua franca, largely unattended (Block, 2017; Cameron, 2012). As such, linguistic studies on the commodification of the more globally oriented-English language in tourism discourse and practices are still underdeveloped.

Considering the tourist situation in China, the Chinese tourism industry has grown rapidly since the country started implementing its open-up policy in 1978. China has now become one of the primary tourism destinations in the world, attracting an increasing number of overseas visitors. The present study adds to the existing body of literature an exploration into English as an international “default” language in the tourism marketplace of China, a nation which has long been recognised as playing a significant role in the global tourism industry yet has received relatively little academic attention from a linguistic perspective.

#### FROM LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY TO LANGUAGE COMMODIFICATION

Arising in the 1960s, the deployment of linguistic resources in the circulation of goods and services has long been noticed in the field of language economics (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977, 1991; Coulmas, 1992; Irvine, 1989). The simile of language as a commodity has a long tradition, with its basis on a loose understanding of exchange. In the early days of linguistics, Saussure (1971) notes that language works like a commodity, and linguistic value could be compared with market value: like different goods in a market, words acquire value on the basis of their differences from other words in the same system and are "exchanged" across the language system.

Coulmas (1992) also claims that languages are like commodities and further adopts the distinction between ‘value in use’ and ‘value in exchange’ from an economist’s perspective to understand the value of language. For Coulmas, language as a commodity means that 'languages have a market value', which is the 'exchange value a certain language has as a commodity (p.78)'. In this sense, the commodity nature of a language is mainly concerned with its exchange value, which may (or may not) be affected by its use value.

Apart from this, under the symbolic economy of the neoliberal world, the reality of the situation has been established that language as a commodity has now turned from a figurative expression to one that symbolises social reality. Language can be treated as a "linguistic capital" and has developed into a potential "linguistic market" in itself (Bourdieu, 1991), which calls for and deserves in-depth linguistic and sociolinguistic research.

The concepts of "linguistic capital" and "linguistic market" can be traced back to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu (1991), there is a "linguistic market" as a field of linguistic exchange whereby social actors with different volumes of linguistic capital trade their language varieties and linguistic proficiencies to gain economic benefits. Bourdieu is most concerned with the emergence and workings of a unified national, linguistic market affiliated with the official language, where the key issue is the high value of standard languages relative to vernacular dialects. This being said, by providing a reinterpretation of linguistic practices as a form of symbolic capital that is a constitutive part of the political economy and convertible to economic capital, Bourdieu has provided a systematic extension of the economic approach to language studies, thus preparing the ground for later studies of language commodification.

In the field of applied linguistics, it is in early critical discourse analysis that one finds the first references to the rise of the consumer culture and the marketisation of public discourse (Fairclough, 1992, 1993). According to Fairclough (2000, p.163), marketisation refers to 'the extension of market modes of operation to new areas of social life' and is used interchangeably with the word "commodification".

With the neoliberal turn opening up a perspective to study language as intrinsically tied up with the logic of political economy and the creation of niche markets (Heller & Pujolar, 2009; Muth, 2018), the issue of language economics has gained new force over the past few decades. An increasing number of linguists have come to investigate the negotiation of linguistic resources for economic gains in the globalised new economy (e.g., Brennan & O'Rourke, 2019; Cameron, 2012; Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Heller, 2003, 2010). From a linguistic perspective, Heller and Pujolar (2009) understand language commodification as a social process which can be fruitfully explored by focusing on discursive production of various kinds.

According to Heller, the commodification of language could be explained and understood on two levels: one level relates to the extent to which forms of linguistic exchange that used to be treated as a sign of authenticity are now treated as directly exchangeable for material goods and money; the other level concerns the extent to which the circulation of goods that used to depend on the deployment of other kinds of resources now depends on the deployment of linguistic resources.

In light of this consideration, the study of language commodification does not suffice to examine the characteristics of language as a commodity in itself; we have to understand the process whereby the commodity is circulated and produced. With a focus on the commodification of the English language, the present study will take into account both the English language as a commodity that is directly exchangeable for material goods and money and English language commodification, which is concerned with the use of English in a way that can not only be bought or sold directly, but rather it facilitates the exchange of goods and services, thus creating economic benefits.

The commodification of language is especially relevant in tourism studies. As Urry and Larsen (2011) note, under the condition of touristic consumption, much of what is appreciated and consumed is not directly experienced reality but rather representations of reality, which are more often than not achieved through the medium of linguistic descriptions and visual presentations. This tendency of language commodification in tourism is further noted by Jaworski and Thurlow (2010), who suggest that tourism exemplifies a semiotically embedded service, and a key part of what is actually produced and consumed in tourism is the linguistic inscription of the service itself. As an industry, tourism has gone from the standardised product focusing on leisure, to niche markets focusing on heritage, experience and the environment, in which language, with its added value, emerges as a central element (Heller, 2010).

Following the initial propositions of Bourdieu (1991), a number of scholars have worked on the commodification of local languages in the promotion of heritage tourism (Heller, 2003; Heller & Pujolar, 2009; Pujolar & Jones, 2012) and the construction of local linguistic landscapes (Leeman & Modan, 2009; Schneider, 2014). Adding to these studies, the commodification of national/regional identities through language is also explored following the line of sociolinguistic research (e.g., Casey, 2013; Heller, 2003, 2011; Heller, Jaworski & Thurlow, 2014; Jaworski et al., 2014).

In the meantime, as Cameron (2012, p. 354) notes, while the neoliberal market has increased the market value of indigenous and minority languages, 'overall, the main beneficiaries

are the dominant languages of international commerce, with English for the moment preeminent among them'. Over the years, the economic value of English has mainly been investigated in the field of language education (e.g., Grin, 2001; Hamid, 2016; Rubdy, 2008; Tan & Rubdy, 2008) and also touched upon in tourism studies (e.g., Jaworski & Piller, 2008; Piller, 2007), and call centres (e.g., Duchêne, 2009; Heller, 2010). It follows then that the current study will be more concerned with the globally oriented linguistic market of English as an international "default" language in the global tourism market (Piller, 2007).

## METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

According to Yin and Vine (2022), a case study is an empirical inquiry that 1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when 2) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and 3) multiple sources of evidence are used.' As a popular research design in tourism research, a case study is often adopted as a tool to produce "deep" insights into a certain phenomenon, including conclusions based on the context of the topic being studied and involving the use of multiple methods and data sources (Smith, 2010). A case study is affirmed as the appropriate design as this study is highly context-sensitive, involving multiple sources of research data and research participants that could most easily be tracked from empirical case studies.

The case study site of this research, the Palace Museum, is also famously known as the Forbidden City. It covers an area of 725,000 square meters in the centre of Beijing, with Tian'anmen Square lying in front of its major south gate. As the imperial palace of Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, the Palace Museum was declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1987 and also as the world's largest preservation of wooden structures from the ancient world. The Palace Museum was chosen as the case study site not only because of its historical influence and world status but also because of its popularity as a world-famous tourist destination. It earns the status as the second top attraction in China (just after the Great Wall) by TravelChinaGuide.com and is branded as a must-visit scenic spot in Beijing for international tourists by visitbeijing.com. According to the official data from the Palace Museum website, in 2019, the number of international tourists reached more than 1 million. As such, the Palace Museum provides an ideal site of engagement for the present study on the commodification of the English language in Chinese tourism.

Research data for this study were primarily derived from three sources: photographs that captured the introductory signboards and captions in the Palace Museum, questionnaire surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Among them, photographs of introductory signboards and captions constitute a major type of data as they provide official information about the Palace Museum and the things on exhibition there and constitute a major source of information for international tourists in the Palace Museum. Altogether, 185 signboards and captions were captured on site. Linguistic contents were recorded and used with permission from the Education and Publicity Department of the Palace Museum.

To better understand the process of English language commodification at the research site from a multitude of perspectives, questionnaire and interview data were also collected. The questionnaire mainly focused on participants' English language experience on-site and used a 4-point Likert scale to measure the participants' attitudes towards English language commodification. Items used in the questionnaire were inspired by a number of studies in the research area, for

instance, Heller's and Jaworski's works on language commodification in tourism (Heller, 2010; Heller, Jaworski & Thurlow, 2014; Heller, Pujolar & Duchêne, 2014), Cenoz and Gorter's (2009) discussion on language economy, Cameron's (2012) chapter about the commodification of English as a global commodity. Altogether, 111 informants participated in the survey, including 78 international tourists, 30 service workers and three tour guides. To dig deeper into the topics from the questionnaire, a third type of data, follow-up semi-structured interviews from willing questionnaire participants, was collected, which included 16 international tourists, six service workers and three tour guides. All the participants in the study were contacted on-site on a voluntary basis. A consent form was signed beforehand, which stated the purpose of the project and assured them of the confidentiality of their identity and other personal information. For the same purpose, all names used in this article are pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity.

It is important to note here that the research participants surveyed and interviewed in this study do not constitute a sample, and their responses are not meant to represent their group population as a whole. Rather, they form groups of informants with diverse affiliations who provide a range of perspectives on English language commodification in the Palace Museum.

The data collected were then coded and analysed under the theoretical framework of language commodification and complemented by the emerging themes of English language commodification as perceived by the three groups of participants. This case study research design considering both emic and etic perspectives of the use of the English language in the Palace Museum would hopefully present a relatively comprehensive view of English language commodification in Chinese tourism.

## ENGLISH AS A COMMODITY IN THE PALACE MUSEUM

The expansion of China as one of the major tourism destinations in the world has accelerated the commodification of the semiotic landscapes in China and the English language as a commodity in particular. Rather than taking the English language for granted as the ordinary, unremarkable medium of social interaction as in the inner circle of native English-speaking countries (Kachru, 1985), the Chinese tourism industry is increasingly seeing English as a highly marketable resource to be actively managed and traded for economic benefits.

In the Palace Museum, the commercial value of the English language as a commodity is first and foremost manifest on a signboard signifying the prices of guide services in different languages. Figure 1 was captured in front of the Meridian Gate before entering the touring zone inside the Palace Museum.



FIGURE 1. Charge of Guide Services in the Palace Museum

On the signboard, it is stated clearly that two kinds of tour guide services are officially provided in the Palace Museum: 1) the automatic guide device, which is a handy pad with an earphone officially distributed by the Palace Museum, and introduces a spot automatically as tourists enter a certain area; 2) and the docent-guided tour, which is led by a travel guide, and understandably, is much more expensive.

As stated in Figure 1, different prices are listed for the same tour guide service in Chinese and in English. Take the automatic guide service, for example; while the Chinese characters read that "自动讲解器: 20 元每台 (Automatic Guide Device: 20RMB/Each)", the corresponding English content below reads: "Automatic Guide Charge: 40 RMB", which is twice as much as the same service in the Chinese language. The prices also vary for the docent-guided tours provided in different languages, with the official Chinese tour guide charging 260 RMB for a whole route travelling in the Palace Museum for a group of no more than five visitors, 150 RMB for Central and Western route travelling; 100 RMB for Central route travelling only; and an extra 10 RMB would be charged for each additional visitor. Lying below the Chinese content, the English message goes that 400 yuan (RMB) for all routes, 300 yuan for Central and Western routes, 200 yuan for the Central route for a tour group of no more than 5 people, and an additional 20 yuan would be charged for each additional member. Again, the English services charge two times the prices of their corresponding Chinese services.

Imaginably, quite a few signboards with similar contents were captured in the Palace Museum to designate the prices of tour guide services, which altogether provide a window to encapsulate the monetary value of different language services on site. This deployment of linguistic practices is no longer neatly bounded to the more traditional approach of language as a strategic styling resource but more as a measurable skill with economic values to be marketed and traded with international tourists in the Palace Museum with the economic value of English (as the dominant language of international commerce) far outweighs that of the Chinese language.

It follows then that in the market-driven tourism context of China, while language choice as business choice results in high visibility of both Chinese and English, the market value of each

linguistic resource is largely conditioned by its availability in a Chinese tourism context. In China, a country where English is taught and learnt as a foreign language, the availability of English resources in the Chinese tourism context is still very limited, and the expertise in English is very uneven among Chinese citizens. This then leads to the much more expensive prices of the English services than their Chinese counterparts.

The high economic value attached to the English language and the international tourism market demand has led to the emergence of the profession of English-speaking tour guides in the Palace Museum. For this group of tour guides, their English language proficiency has become a valuable resource that could be exchanged directly for money: it is something they could rely on to make a living in China. As one of the tour guide interviewees, Robin said, when asked why he chose to be an English tour guide:

When I graduated [from college], I did not have any work experience, and it was hard to find a good job. My only strong point is that I can speak English, and I want to find a job that uses English.

[translated, original interview in Chinese]

[Extract 1 Interview data with Robin]

The interview data add further support to the possibility of the huge market demand for the English language and its higher market value than other languages in the Chinese tourism industry. In the meanwhile, there were other indirect economic benefits while English services were provided in the Chinese tourism context; these "side effects" of the English language, although they do not create direct monetary incomes, could also be considered as part of the economic gain, forming an inherent part in the process of English language commodification, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMMODIFICATION IN THE PALACE MUSEUM

In the tourism market of the Palace Museum, English language commodification could be broadly detected in terms of the functions that the English language serves, which generates corresponding values of the language. In general, three major values could be detected from the research data. They are, respectively, the communicative value, the informative value, and the symbolic value.

### THE COMMUNICATIVE VALUE

With tourism being a field relying increasingly on services characterised by intercultural communication, the significance of English as an essential communication tool in the international tourism business is now beyond dispute.

Survey results from the international tourist participants in the Palace Museum show that 85.9% of them considered English as the most important language of communication during their trip to the Palace Museum, in Beijing, and even in China. This is further elaborated in the following interview data with Jason, who came from Spain, mastering Spanish, Catalan, and English (in order of proficiency):

There is no doubt that English should be the most important (language) for me here. Like, I can only say a few words in Chinese, and people here don't know any Spanish or Catalan. So English is the only choice for me. I mean, mostly, people will know some English, and we could communicate in English. And there are many English (boards) around that provide all kinds of

information. So English is the most useful language.

[Extract 2 Interview data with Jason]

Jason was certainly not an exceptional case, as there were recurrent references by the other participants to the importance and usefulness of the English language as a means of communication. On a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), the international participants generally presented a positive attitude towards the statement “Your ability to speak English makes your trip easier in the Palace Museum.” with a Mean of 3.04 (SD=.986).

The communicative value of English is also fully realised among the service workers in the Palace Museum. As the service worker interviewee, Tian, noted, from an internal perspective:

English provides us with a means to communicate with foreigners. When the foreign tourists come to consult us, they always use English. When they are buying things in a souvenir store, we need to introduce the goods to them in English. [...] We have to use the English language during the process.

[translated, original interview in Chinese]

[Extract 3 Interview data with Tian]

Extracts 2 and 3 above correspond with Piller's (2007) proposition that language choice as an investment decision is a business choice in the context of tourism, conditioned by the target market and available resources. In the Palace Museum, English is used as the international "default" language, as it is relatively more readily available for the service workers there and serves the needs of international tourists and service workers to the best extent possible.

Survey results from service workers provide further evidence for a strong agreement among them on the communicative value of the English language in the Palace Museum. On a Likert scale from 1=strongly agree to 4=Strongly Agree, the service worker participants tended to be very positive in the claims that “Your ability to speak English makes your work a lot easier in the Palace Museum” (Mean=3.63, SD=.556) and “Speaking English enables you to communicate with foreign tourists in the Palace Museum” (Mean=3.60, SD=.563).

As an irreplaceable means of international communication, the English language is now gaining in stature as the global lingua franca in the Palace Museum, facilitating contact between hosts and tourists on site and negotiating communicative differences between speakers of diverse cultures. In this sense, the English language used in the Palace Museum can be properly described as "a language for communication". It could be taken as a useful and versatile tool with communicative value when cross-cultural interactions are involved in the linguistic market of the Palace Museum.

#### THE INFORMATIVE VALUE

Constituting an indispensable component in English language commodification, the informative value of the English language focuses on the function of English in the Palace Museum to convey information to tourists. As Sperber and Wilson (2002) suggest, every act of communication is an ostensive inferential process in the sense that interactions of any kind are accompanied by words or texts that provide information about the theme under concern. Under the general category of tourism discourse in the Palace Museum, the tour operator (the addresser/advertiser) makes use of English language resources as ostensive stimuli to provide necessary information to tourists and



international tourists in particular.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 present two examples of commonly presented linguistic signs in the Palace Museum.

FIGURE 1. Road sign



FIGURE 2. Caption of Court Beads



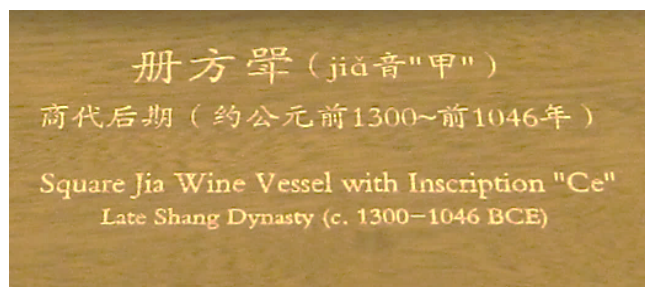
Figure 2 is a road sign captured in front of the Gate of Earthly Tranquility, which signifies that the road ahead leads to the Imperial Garden, while going left, the tourists can arrive at Kunning men Visitor Services Area and the Six Western Palaces. Together with the other road signs, it gives information about the location of scenic spots in the Palace Museum.

The caption in Figure 3 was captured in the Gallery of Treasures. It introduces a string of black beads on exhibition in the gallery. The English message reads, “A string of court beads made of lapis lazuli Kangxi period (1662-1722), Qing Dynasty”. While this caption is quite simple, it informs the tourists about the function of the beads: “court beads”, its texture: “made of lapis lazuli”, and the time when it was used: “Kangxi period (1662-1722), Qing Dynasty”.

In general, the international tourist participants gave positive feedback concerning the informative value of the English language in the Palace Museum. On a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), the international participants generally agree that English signboards and services offer them information about the Palace Museum (Mean=3.36, SD=.743).

So far, the English signboards and introductions reproduced in this section are discussed mainly in terms of the information they convey to international tourists with no or only a low command of the Chinese language. Nowadays, with a large number of EFL learners in China and increasing English language literacy among Chinese citizens, this informative value also has a role to play among Chinese tourists. This situation is especially relevant in the heritage tourism context, where many Chinese archaisms related to antiques are adopted in tourist introductory texts. Figure 4 is a case in point captured in the Palace of Celestial Favor. It introduces a type of wine vessel in ancient China.

FIGURE 4. Square Jia Wine Vessel



In this caption, the Chinese characters “册(pronunciation: cè)” and “方(pronunciation: fāng)” are used quite often by Chinese people. What causes the problem is the other Chinese character “罍(pronunciation: jiǎ)”, which is a rarely-used Chinese archaism, as suggested by the Pinyin and the Chinese character “甲” (with the same pronunciation) in the brackets to help domestic tourists with its Chinese pronunciation. By reading the Chinese content, local tourists may still have a problem working out what this antique was used for. Even for the authors, who have been using Chinese for decades, the word does not ring a bell. As concerning the other more frequently used characters “册” and “方”, while the word “方” means square, indexing the shape of the antique, people may have no idea about why the word “册” is used here. A basic command of English solves these problems perfectly: “罍 Jia” means wine vessel, and the word “册 Ce” is used because the vessel has the inscription “Ce” in it, with all expressions in plain English.

With an emphasis on heritage tourism and as a museum of palaces in Ming and Qing Dynasties where exhibitions of ancient artefacts are held, the Palace Museum, Figure 4, is not the only case where the use of Chinese archaisms poses comprehensive problems to Chinese tourists. Chinese tourists with a basic command of the English language sometimes have to resort to the English content to grasp the ideas transmitted in the captions. It follows then that the informative value of the English language, while externally oriented to serve international tourists most of the time, may also exhibit as a resource with informative value for internal consumption by Chinese tourists.

#### THE SYMBOLIC VALUE

In the globalised economy of today, the English language has been successfully marketed as the language of development, modernity, and scientific and technological advancement (Kelly-Holmes, 2005), and people tend to associate products adopting the English language with these qualities. The employment of English as an international lingua franca lends an aura of chic prestige to the signboards with the English language and the scenic spots with these signboards, suggesting that they are part of the international scene. This then leads to the symbolic value of the English language in the Palace Museum. For example, in Figure 5, a billboard of hotdog was captured near the Palace of Earthly Tranquility.

FIGURE 5. Hotdog signboard



On this signage, it is clear that the asymmetrical presentation of the two linguistic codes, Chinese and English, is suggestive of the inequality between the respective spaces and, consequently, the value, quality, and validity that are attached to the two languages. The salience of the two large Chinese characters "热狗(Hotdog)", which occupies nearly half the board, on a top preferred position, suggests the relative importance of the Chinese language in informing the general tourists about the kinds of food sold in the store and serves to fortify the localness or the local origin of this food service. On the signboard, the only English message is located at the bottom of the board, which reads, in a much humbler font than the Chinese ones, "ZIYIN?EY/HEAT SPLEENEMBELLISH LUNG/PROLONG LIFE". These English words, or rather English-like expressions, which were supposed to be the translation of its above Chinese content, which reads "鲜香美味(Delicious in Taste)", actually did not make much sense among the English-speaking tourists. It is not structurally grammatical, and the words used do not seem to relate to hotdogs which were sold in the snack bar or the Chinese inscriptions. In this sense, the actual meaning of this English-like expression seemed to be less important here; what really mattered was that there was some "English" on the board, which added an air of internationalism to this food store. The presence of English on this billboard is thus more for its symbolic value of an international food shop in a world-famous tourism spot rather than for its informational and communicative values.

Findings from the questionnaire further confirmed the symbolic value of the English language in the Palace Museum from the perspectives of international tourists and service workers. On the whole, the distribution of the levels of agreement on the symbolic values of English was substantially similar for both groups of participants. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), members from both cohorts were most consentaneous and also most consistent on the use of the English language as a symbol of internationalism (Mean=3.35 for international tourists; Mean=3.63 for service workers) and modernism (Mean=3.29 for international tourists; Mean=3.60 for service workers) in the Palace Museum. The participants agreed least on the proposition that "Speaking English makes you feel fashionable." While the Chinese participants, in general, showed positive attitudes towards this expression (Mean=3.00), the international tourists, however, tended to be somewhat negative (Mean=2.19).

When asked why they disagreed with this statement, the international interviewees said, "I don't think speaking English is fashionable; I just need to speak English; I mean, I have to". Interestingly, the Chinese service worker, Wei, when posed the same question, responded that:

Yes, I do think speaking English makes me feel fashionable, as it is mostly the young people who use English (in China). Sometimes, when I am introducing goods to foreigners, some (Chinese) people would just stand aside and look at me; they just say, "Wow, your English is really good; you can speak with foreigners", and I can feel their admiration, you know.

[translated, original interview in Chinese]

[Extract 4 Interview data with Wei]

Aside from the two ends with the highest and lowest consentaneousness shared by both groups, for the international tourists, speaking English meant more about global citizenship to them (Mean=2.81) rather than good education (Mean=2.42), while in contrast, for the Chinese service workers, speaking English made them feel well-educated (Mean=3.24) more than like a global citizen (Mean=3.17). According to the on-site interviews, this was because, for many international tourists, English was their second language, and for some even their first language; in these cases, speaking English had little to do with their education level. But the fact that they had to speak English in China, rather than some local Chinese varieties, meant that they were part of the global picture in the Chinese tourism context; they were different from the local Chinese people, thus fortifying their identity as global citizens. However, for the Chinese service workers, speaking English did not mean that they had gained global citizenship as much as implication that they had received a good education. To them, the English language functions more like a communicative tool than an identity marker.

This is actually in consonance with Li's (2006) research on new Chinglish, which points out that learning a foreign language does not necessarily mean accepting and internalising the cultural values and ideologies that the language typically carries. The service workers use English as a practical instrument to communicate with international tourists, which is less connected to the social identities and ideologies attached to the language. The value of the English language as a technical, universally available skill certainly outweighs the value of "language as identity" for the local service workers in the Palace Museum.

A key to understanding the association between English proficiency and good education among service workers and the symbolic value of the English language in China lies in two major features. First, the language education policies in China have legitimised and consolidated the symbolic value of English in the Chinese tourism market. In China, English is officially taught and learnt as a foreign language at school. English proficiency is seen as an integral part of quality education in China. It is held officially by the Chinese government that an adequate command of English is necessary and important for the sustained development of the country. The ideology that English is for globalisation, informatisation, and economic and social development has ensured the symbolic value of the English language in China. Second, the uneven distribution of the English language as an economic resource across different social groups in China reaffirms and advances the symbolic value of the language. Imaginably, across the vast landscape of China, differences exist across regions in terms of economic, social, and cultural development, as well as the infrastructures for English language teaching. It follows then that in the socio-educational landscape of China, English and the privileges associated with high English proficiency are more accessible to those who are economically advantaged. High English proficiency is thus a symbol of good education, decent career, and high socioeconomic status in China. This may also give a hint as to why the symbolic value of the English language seems to be more prominent for Chinese

local service workers than for international tourists.

#### OTHER VALUES

In addition to the aforementioned values, which are directly attached to the English linguistic landscape on site, forming the most prominent aspects of English language commodification in the Palace Museum, there are also some more indirect values.

First is the aesthetic value, which is the subjective and sensory-emotional value that an object possesses in virtue of its capacity to elicit pleasure when appreciated or experienced aesthetically (Plato & Meskin, 2014). In this sense, bilateral symmetry and balance have been considered as artistic beauty in Chinese culture, forming an important feature in Chinese architecture. In the Palace Museum, the English signboards and their Chinese equivalents are sometimes pinned to the columns on both sides in front of the ancient architecture and have become part of the scene themselves. In other cases, bilingual Chinese and English signboards are adopted, with the Chinese and English contents evenly distributed on the board, each occupying half the space. In both cases, the English signboards/contents add up to the aesthetic standard of harmony and symmetry in the Palace Museum. As reflected in the questionnaire data, around 86% of the international participants did agree that signboards with English equivalents were more eye-catching than those in Chinese only. While this might be influenced to some extent by the informative function of the English language, the symmetric distribution of the two languages should also have certain roles to play in seizing international tourists' attention.

Also, there is the existence value. As Cenoz and Gorter (2009) note, speakers of different languages may enjoy the existence of these languages simply because they identify with them. The English-speaking international tourists, most of whom do not have proficiency in Chinese, might acquire a sense of familiarity and security when they encounter English instructions and introductions during the tour. To put it in other words, by creating an image of a familiar English lingua scape within the exotic tourism marketplace of China, the Palace Museum gives international tourists a sense of "exotic familiarity" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p. 280). These English presentations reassure the international tourists about the safety of travelling in the Palace Museum: they can remain "who they are" even outside their hometown, and their identities and presence are largely recognised and well respected in the tourist spot. By identifying with the English language as a lingua franca, international tourists find comfort in the exotic landscape of the Palace Museum, getting by with little or even no Chinese linguistic skills.

These two values, although less directly observable, constitute inherent parts of the economic value of the English language in the symbolic economy of Chinese tourism and in the Palace Museum in particular. Together, they serve to facilitate and stimulate the exchange of tourist goods and services, thus bringing economic benefits to the Palace Museum as an international tourist spot.

#### CONCLUSION

Echoing premier studies on language commodification and moving a step forward, this article takes into consideration both language as a commodity and language commodification in the symbolic market of the Palace Museum. As Piller (2007) notes, languages are not equally but hierarchically distributed according to their economic importance in the market-driven tourism context. Findings in this study show that in Chinese tourism context, while language choice as

business choice resulted in the ubiquity of English as an economic resource, it is by no means a “cheap” resource, as it was still out of the reach of the majority of social actors in the linguistic community of China.

From the perspective of English language commodification, the current study also considers the active roles that English plays in the linguistic market of the Palace Museum. Results show that the English language facilitates the circulation of touristic goods and services mainly in three ways: first, it facilitates the communication between hosts and tourists – the communicative value; second, it provides general information for tourists – the informative value; last, it symbolises global and modern taste and status, thus helps promote the Palace Museum as an internationally recognised tourism spot – the symbolic value. Other less observable values include the aesthetic value and the existence value.

It needs to be noted here that the values that arose in this study should not be taken as mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive in the process of English language commodification. Juxtaposing the different types of values is not to say that they are always as neatly distinguishable as presented in this study. Though they are different and recognisable in theoretical terms, empirically speaking, they work in the same direction to realise the commodification of the English language. In fact, whenever the English language is used in the Palace Museum, it is, most of the times, a synchronous realisation of all these values: a communicative process in English would inevitably provide certain information, and the use of English as the tool of linguistic communication and information transfer in a particular context always has its symbolic value, and the same is true for the existence value and the aesthetic value.

It is also noteworthy that although the different values are indispensable to each other and work simultaneously to realise the commodification of the English language in the Palace Museum, data analysis from this study also reflects that emphases on different values tend to vary with regard to the specific needs of tourists and the different roles people play in the tourism spot. In general, the informative value and the existential value tend to prevail mainly for international tourists' consumption, while the communicative value, the symbolic value, and the aesthetic value seem to be equally applicable to both international tourists and local Chinese, with the symbolic value being a bit more oriented towards the native Chinese participants.

This study, although situated in the linguistic landscape of the Palace Museum, its findings can illuminate what happens with the English language in the Chinese tourism marketplace and the various market dimensions that English could be of value for both the tourists and those who are toured, as well as local tourism institutions in China. Different from what Piller (2007) has observed in Swiss tourism marketing, where English capability is a prerequisite for tourism workers, in China, English is not considered part of the general qualifications for tourism service workers. However, this does not deny the importance and values of the English language in a Chinese tourism context. Rather, with the English language out of the reach of ordinary actors in China, the Chinese tourism market endows the language with a relatively higher market value than the local Chinese language, and possibly than it could be in other linguistic markets with much higher proficiency and visibility of the English language. As such, the linguistic situation of China with the English language as neither a majority nor an official language makes the economic value of the language even more significant and observable (Grin, 2001), turning the Chinese tourism market into an ideal "site of engagement" to study English language commodification. The findings of this study will hopefully shed light on the adoption and the economic value of the English language in similar contexts in the world where the English language shares a comparable status as a foreign language.

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