Implications of the Urban Landscape:

Aspects of the Isan Cultural Maintenance and Revitalization Program

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Abstract

This article describes the multilingual landscape aspect of the Isan Culture Maintenance and Revitalization Programme (ICMRP), a 500,000-euro, four-year European Union co-sponsored cultural maintenance and revival project focusing on the Thai Lao, Thailand's largest ethnic minority community, in four municipalities in Northeast Thailand. The article begins by situating the multilingual landscape of the ICMRP within a holistic project, including manufacturing 'ethnic' student and municipal uniforms, teaching Isan as a mother tongue, recording a multimedia cultural archive, and designing and installing multilingual signage. It then argues the ICMRP's multilingual landscape should be understood within a framework involving geosemiotics, the linguistic landscape, and language policy and planning. The ICMRP's multilingual landscape contributes to the standardisation of a Thai Lao alphabet and spelling. It also seeks to officialise Thai Lao, through official signage, and thereby promote Thai Lao's revival, as part of meeting Thailand's human rights obligations as well as ASEAN community building.

Keywords: *ASEAN, community-building, geosemiotics, inclusion, linguistic landscape, Thai Lao*

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Introduction

The Isan Culture Maintenance and Revitalization Programme (ICMRP) ran from 2011 to 2016 and was a 500,000-euro, European Union co-sponsored cultural program designed to promote Northeast Thai culture (Draper and Mitchell, Forthcoming). Within Northeast Thailand, which has a strong ethno-regional identity (Keyes, 1967, 2014), the ICMRP mainly focused, due to resource constraints, on the culture of the Thai Lao (Keyes, 1966). The Thai Lao, including their various sub-branches, are Thailand's second largest acknowledged ethnic community after the Central Thai (Draper &Kamnuansilpa, 2016). As an ethnic community, they occupy a socio-linguistic and socio-psychological space on a continuum between Lao and Thai (Enfield, 2002; Hesse-Swain, 2011). Their cultural 'substrate,' however, is Lao (McCargo and Hongladarom, 2004:219) despite attempts to assimilate them into Siam and, subsequently, Thailand (Breazeale, 1975; Keyes, 2014). Their relationship with Bangkok has been interpreted with reference to internal colonialism theory (Brown, 1994). It is a center-periphery relationship exacerbated by the primate nature of Bangkok (London, 1978, 1979), one which makes Bangkok vulnerable to socio-political cleavages involving the Thai Lao (Fong 2013) and potentially ethno-political civil war (Campbell, 2014; Fuller, 2014).

The ICMRP was conceived as a means to recognize legitimate Thai Lao aspirations within a formal, 'managed' cultural maintenance and revitalization program (Draper, 2012), especially in the area of linguistic human rights (Draper, 2013a). The project was coordinated by the College of Local Administration at Khon Kaen University (KKU), the regional tertiary establishment for Northeast Thailand. It included four quasi-autonomous municipalities, i.e., Ban Phai (BPM), Chum Phae (CPM), Khon Kaen (KKM), and Muang Phon (MPM). In just over four years, the ICMRP successfully implemented 'ethnic' locally designed and manufactured student and municipal uniforms in BPM (Draper, 2016a), an internationally recognized multimedia archive of cultural performances in MPM to be curated by Monash University (Draper and Mitchell, Forthcoming), and a Thai Lao curriculum and Thai Lao teaching materials in KKM (Draper, 2015; Winfield and Draper, Forthcoming).

However, the most conceptually advanced aspect of the ICMRP was the provision of multilingual signage, in partnership with CPM (Draper and Prasertsri, 2013; Draper; 2016b). This is because two applied linguists (sociolinguists) were involved in the ICMRP, one of whom had an understanding of social semiotics and ethnolinguistics. This allowed the ICMRP to build on previous experience in two areas. The first was researching Thai Lao ethnolinguistic vitality (Draper, 2010). The second was designing and installing a variety of permanent and semi-permanent multilingual (Thai, Thai Lao, English) signage in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at KKU (Draper, 2013b; Draper and Nilaiyaka, 2014), including the first 'official' Thai-Thai Lao-English faculty sign in Northeast Thailand – a form of 'university multilingualism' (Antia, 2015).

Figure 1. Multilingual Thai-Thai Lao-English sign at the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, KKU. Source: ICMRP.

These developments indirectly led to Thai Lao being added to the existing Thai and English languages on the two main signs at KKU's south gate during the ICMRP, making it the first university in Northeast Thailand to have this manner of signage ("Khon Kaen Uni," 2014).

Figure 2. Multilingual Thai-Thai Lao-English sign at KKU. Source: ICMRP.

As part of the ICMRP, the first official municipal multilingual Thai-Thai Lao-English signage was installed in Chum Phae, then in Muang Phon, Ban Phai, and Khon Kaen (Draper; 2016b; Draper and Mitchell, Forthcoming; Draper and Prasertsri, 2013).

The article now contextualizes the multilingual landscape created by the ICMRP in terms of geosemiotics, the linguistic landscape, and language policy and planning. Then, it provides a geosemiotic description of the aesthetics and design aspects. Finally, it discusses the multicultural landscape created within the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, one of three main pillars of the ASEAN Community, employing the concepts of community building and inclusion.

A Conceptual Framework for the Urban Design Aspects of the ICMRP

A Discourse of Place: Geosemiotics

Multilingual signage exists within what has been termed *geosemiotics* (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) or *social semiotics* and, particularly, the *semiotic landscape* (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006:6, 16-44). This includes any language and visual communication. Geosemiotics enables us to realize that a place creates its own discourses in time and place (Scollon and Scollon, 2003:166-196), when viewed by observers. These discourses are based on indexical interpretations, and thus the dialogicality and situatedness, of a place's *icons, symbols, and indexes* (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: vii-viii, 197-207). Geosemiotics includes the interaction order of a participant in a place, the visual semiotics of the place itself, and the place semiotics within the wider context, broken down into code preferences, nature of inscriptions, emplacement issues, and the discourses in time and space that are embedded or generated (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Within Northeast Thailand, the focus of this paper, the cultural planning aspects and Sino-Thai Thai-Lao power relations of the geosemiotics of Khon Kaen City, the unofficial capital of Northeast Thailand, have been addressed by researchers (Brereton, 2012; Chantranusorn Jutawiriya and Mee-Udorn, 2014).

The Linguistic Landscape (LL)

Geosemiotics has been employed as part of the foundational theory for another relatively new conceptual development and way of understanding multilingualism: the 'linguistic landscape' (LL). Though a few earlier mentions of the term exist in the literature, such as Ochs (1993), this field of research, focusing on all forms of linguistic representation in place discourse, from signs to billboards and calling cards, was popularized by Rodrigue Landry and Richard Bourhis (1997) in the instance of French-speaking Quebec. As of October 27, 2016, LL was mentioned in 228 articles in SCOPUS. Important early work considered the linguistic landscape of Israel (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht, 2006), Bangkok (Huebner, 2006), Tokyo (Backhaus, 2006), and, particularly, the implications for minority languages in Friesland and the Basque Country (Cenoz and Gorter, 2006). The latter study emphasized that the linguistic landscape has both information and symbolic functions and that the different prominences of languages in the LL reflect power relations. Crucially, the use of a minority language can "contribute most directly to the positive social identity of ethnolinguistic groups" (Landry and Bourhis, 1997:27), via affective, symbolic factors like prestige. In contrast, the use of English "activates values such as international orientation, future orientation, success, sophistication, or fun orientation" (Cenoz and Gorter, 2006:70).

This early research then led to significant work on various theoretical perspectives, methodological issues, language policy issues, and the relationship between identity and awareness (Shohamy and Gorter, 2009), as well as in-depth analysis of aspects of the urban LL, including power relations, perceptions, and benefits of the LL (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, and Barni, 2010). Within Thailand, elements of the LL were first considered by Smalley (1994:17-18), then Huebner (2006) for Thai, Chinese, and English in Bangkok, and Draper (2013b) and Draper and Nilaiyaka (2014) in the case of promoting the Thai Lao, Thai, and English multilingual landscape in KKU. These latter, university-based studies were located in academic domains (commercial signs in a student and faculty canteen setting, student union signs, university faculty signs) and found high levels of support (90%) for further multilingual signage. This research then became part of the foundation of the CPM ICMRP action line.

Language Policy and Planning

The conceptual framework for the language policy and planning aspect of the ICMRP was described in some detail by Draper and Prasertsri (2013) and is summarized here. The framework consists of four overlapping concepts for planning and interpreting data, namely Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS, Fishman, 1991); subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV, Allard and Landry 1986, 1992, 1994); Hornberger's language planning goals (1994: 78; see Figure 3 below); and the linguistic landscape (LL, Landry and Bourhis 1997), as explored above.

To elaborate, the GIDS provides a broad taxonomy of the sociolinguistic status of a language. The GIDS can be employed to create high-level objectives for language revitalization and now has thirteen categories (Expanded GIDS or EGIDS), (Lewis and Simons, 2010). Within this more sensitive taxonomy, Thai Lao is category 6b (Threatened, Vulnerable):

> The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.

Thus, the aim of the ICMRP is to assist in supporting Thai Lao and moving the classification to 4 (Educational, Safe):

> Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education (Lewis and Simons, 2010:110).

In EV theory, the main concept of relevance to designing and installing the multilingual signage surveys is *legitimate vitality*. This is manifested in the desire for official multilingual signage using the heritage script promoted by the ICMRP, *Tai Noi,* a pre-cursor script to both Thai and Lao which is most similar to modern Lao and which can still be found in monasteries in the region (Draper 2013b:16).

Viewed through Hornberger's language planning goals, installing multilingual signage featuring Tai Noi contributes to standardisation of the alphabet and

spelling for a heritage script typically found in handwritten manuscripts. Primarily it seeks to officialise Thai Lao (through official signage) and thereby promote the revival of the use of the language in tandem with the KKM ICMRP action line, which produced a curriculum, standard reference dictionary, and teaching materials using *Tai Noi.*

Types	Policy Planning (on form) Goals	Cultivation Planning (on function) Goals
Status Planning (about uses of language)	Standardization Status Officialisation Nationalization Proscription	Revival Maintenance Interlingual communication Intra- / International spread
Acquisition Planning (about users of language)	Group Education/School Literature Religion Mass Media Work	Reacquisition Maintenance First language / Second language Shift
Corpus Planning (about language)	Standardization Corpus Auxiliary code Graphisation	Modernization Lexical Stylistic Renovation Purification Reform Stylistic simplification Terminology unification

Figure 3. Hornberger's language planning goals (Reproduced with permission from Multilingual Matters from Hornberger, 1994: 78).

Geosemiotic Description of the ICMRP's Multilingual Signage

This section provides a geosemiotic description of the multilingual signage installed by the ICMRP in the four municipalities, which can be divided into five main categories: road signs, place signs, route signs, municipality main signs, and children's library signs. While schemes using different variables for coding multilingual signs exist (e.g., Cenoz and Gorter, 2006:71), the present analysis relied on Scollon and Scollon (2013), which allows for an interpretation including the discourse of place. A convenient outline of the geosemiotic coding matrix employed can be found in Scollon and Scollon (2013: 20-21).

With every category of sign, the interaction order is similar. In terms of resources, the participant's sense of time is potentially urgent if the participant is looking for a road, place, correct route, municipality, or library. The time frame is *monochronal* if the participant is standing and looking at the sign or *polychronal* if walking or driving past and viewing or reading the sign. The perceptual space involved in each case is primarily *visual*. The interpersonal distances (proxemics) involved are *intimate* (touch to 18 inches) to personal (18 inches to four feet) if standing in front of and reading the signs or walking past, but primarily *social* (4 feet to 12 feet) or *public* (2 feet to 25 feet) if in or on a vehicle (Hall, 1967:113-130). In terms

of *personal front* or interaction with the sign, the participant may be involved in reading the sign if interested in the information content or design of the sign, otherwise the participant will display *civil inattention*. The units of the interaction order may be single or 'with' others (Goffman, 1971:19), or potentially in queues, especially if driving cars.

Coded information for the visual and place semiotics of the signage is presented in tabular form for ease of reading and comparison. The use of Thai Lao is flagged as potentially *transgressive* (similar to graffiti) throughout because Thai Lao is never normally used in official signage. This is the first official municipal multilingual signage to include Thai Lao and may be interpreted as transgressive, even subversive, despite being the language of an officially recognized ethnolinguistic group of Thailand. To begin, we can see both ornate (BPM) and standard (CPM) Thai road signs. However, both signs have a standard top-down reading, with the most important language, Thai, the national language, higher and in the case of the CPM road sign, slightly larger because of the bold font. Then, the 'local' script, *Tai Noi,* representing the Thai Lao heritage language of the majority of the community, is in the middle. English, the international language and of least relevance to the local people, despite its promise of future enhanced opportunities if mastered, is at the bottom. The Thai in the CPM sign is a non-standard font and indicates some artistic leeway granted in the design process.

Figure 3. Left, BPM road sign. Right, CPM road sign. Source: ICMRP.

Visual Semiotics	Place Semiotics
I) Modality: Clear color differentiation (with colorful design in case of BPM); use of white script on blue contextualizes as road signs and presence of municipal emblem denotes municipality (BPM only); use of gold frame adds brightness and depth II) Composition: Polarised top-bottom information in triptych III) Interactive participants: Producer – sign viewer / reader	I) Pictures: a) Code preference: Top to bottom code preference (Thai-*Tai Noi*-English) b) Inscription: BPM: Angsana New?-ThaiNoiMonwipa?-Times New Roman (equally sized fonts); CPM: SR FahtalaiJone NP-ThaiNoiMonwipa?-Times New Roman (Thai largest, Thai Lao and English smallest); high permanence and durability (metal); new; high quality; additional layers in BPM signs include addition of municipality emblem, floral trim to frame, and floral trim to stand, using BPM municipal flower. c) Emplacement: contextualized (relationship with road), situated at road entrance d) Space: public, special use (road) e) Discourse: infrastructural, municipal public label (road); transgressive (use of Thai Lao)?

Figure 4. Geosemiotic analysis of ICMRP signage: Forty-eight road signs (BPM, CPM).

The place signs for MPM, an example of which can be seen below, also employs the top-down Thai, Thai Lao, English design pattern. The most outstanding aspect of the place sign appears to be the non-standard use of an outline script in the case of all three fonts, indicating some artistic leeway in the design process. An obvious indexical picture of the place exists above the inscription.

Figure 5. CPM place sign. Source: ICMRP.

Visual Semiotics	Place Semiotics
I) Modality: Clear color differentiation, use of white fill, blue outline script on white background II) Composition: Polarized top-bottom information in triptych under indexical representation (picture) of place (e.g., hospital) in blue frame III) Interactive participants: Producer – sign viewer / reader	I) Pictures: a) Code preference: Top to bottom code preference (Thai-*Tai Noi*-English) b) Inscription: SR FahtalaiJone NP-ThaiNoiMonwipa-Times New Roman (Thai largest); high permanence and durability (metal); new; high quality c) Emplacement: contextualized (relationship with place), situated at place entrance d) Space: public, special use (entrance to place) e) Discourse: infrastructural, municipal public label (place); transgressive (use of Thai Lao)?

Figure 6. Geosemiotic analysis of ICMRP signage: Seven place signs (BPM, CPM).

The BPM route signs, an example of which can be seen below, also employ the Thai-Thai Lao-English top-to-bottom design, and they appear to be internationally standardized route signs. However, the Thai Lao is significantly smaller, possibly because the designer was trying to fit Thai Lao into a standard design pattern. This produces the same effect as in Figure 6 (above), the entrance to KKU, where Thai Lao was added to the bilingual Thai-English sign several years after the main sign was installed. The effect is one to diminish the importance of the Thai Lao language compared to the other two, an accurate reflection of its social importance as a written language.

Figure 7. BPM route sign. Source: ICMRP.

Place Semiotics	Interaction Order
I) Modality: Clear color differentiation, standard use of white script on green background (primary route sign) II) Composition: Polarized top-bottom information in three vertical triptychs ('forward,' 'right,' 'left') with index (forward arrow, right arrow, left arrow) III) Interactive participants: Producer – sign viewer / reader	I) Pictures: a) Code preference: Top to bottom code preference (Thai-*Tai Noi*-English) b) Inscription: Sarabun (bold)-ThaiNoiMonwipa-Ebrima (Thai largest, Thai Lao smallest, English medium); high permanence and durability (metal); new; high quality c) Emplacement: contextualized (relationship with place), suspended near traffic lights at main crossroads d) Space: public, special use (crossroads) e) Discourse: infrastructural, municipal public label (route); transgressive (use of Thai Lao)?

Figure 8. Geosemiotic analysis of ICMRP signage: Eight route signs (BPM)

The main municipality sign for MPM differs from the previous signs because of four features. First, it is far more prestigious, and therefore of use to the officialization of Thai Lao, than the previous signs, due to its nature as the main municipal sign for MPM. Second, though surveys indicated popular support for various forms of multilingual signage in MPM (Draper, 2016b:843), only 40.5% supported municipal main signage in an initial survey of approximately 1,500 MPM stakeholders. However, prior to making the decision to commission main signage, the KKU College of Local Administration ICMRP unit informed the MPM mayor of a follow-up survey of the multilingual signage in CPM, which initially had very similar support for municipal signage (40.9%), where the approval rating for the installed signage was 97.2%. This was consistent with other, very high approval ratings for Thai-Thai Lao-English signage (Draper, 2013b:30). One issue during the design and implementation of the signage was that many involved had difficulty conceptualizing signage which included Thai Lao. Once it was seen that signage including Thai Lao could be aesthetically pleasing, the approval rate soared, with the key positive features of the signage being that it maintained and promoted the local language and promoted pride in local indigenous knowledge (Draper, 2016b:843-845). Third, unlike previous signage, the MPM signs put English in the middle and Thai Lao at the bottom. The effect emphasizes English as more important than Thai Lao, possibly reflecting the international outlook of MPM, which is proud of an ongoing relationship with a school in New Zealand. Finally, perhaps also reflecting the lower status of Thai Lao, silver is used for the *Tai Noi* inscription, not gold.

Figure 9. MPM municipality main sign (front entrance). Source: ICMRP.

Place Semiotics	Interaction Order
I) Modality: Maximal color differentiation, i.e., use of gold (and silver?) embossed scripts on black background (municipality sign) II) Composition: Polarized top-bottom information in three vertical triptychs with municipal symbol of MPM on left III) Interactive participants: Producer – sign viewer / reader	I) Pictures: a) Code preference: Top to bottom code preference (Thai-English-*Tai Noi*) b) Inscription: JS Wansika-ThaiNoiMonwipa-EF Lucida Calligraphy? (Thai largest, Thai Lao and English smallest); high permanence and durability (metal on tile in cement emplacement); new; very high quality; front lit at night c) Emplacement: contextualized (relationship with place), in front of main entrance to MPM d) Space: public, special use (municipal front sign) e) Discourse: infrastructural, municipal public label (place); transgressive (use of Thai Lao)?

Figure 10. Geosemiotic analysis of ICMRP signage: MPM municipal main sign (front entrance).

This side entrance municipal sign is, in the inscription, similar to the main sign, save for the fact that it employs gold for every language and has the MPM emblem at the top. The inscription, 'Welcome to Muangphon Municipality,' is formal. Though also set into concrete, the emplacement is of slightly lower quality, and the sign is clearly less prestigious than the front, main sign.

Figure 11. MPM municipal main sign (side entrance). Source: ICMRP.

Place Semiotics	Interaction Order
I) Modality: Maximal color differentiation, i.e., use of gold embossed script on black background (municipality sign) II) Composition: Polarized top-bottom information in three vertical triptychs with municipal symbol of MPM above III) Interactive participants: Producer – sign viewer / reader	I) Pictures: a) Code preference: Top to bottom code preference (Thai-English-*Tai Noi*) b) Inscription: JS Wansika-ThaiNoiMonwipa-EF Lucida Calligraphy? (Thai largest, then Thai Lao, then English); high permanence and durability (metal on tile in cement emplacement); new; high quality c) Emplacement: contextualized (relationship with place), in front of side entrance to MPM d) Space: public, special use (municipal side sign) e) Discourse: infrastructural, municipal public label (place); transgressive (use of Thai Lao)?

Figure 12. Geosemiotic analysis of ICMRP signage: MPM municipal main sign (side entrance).

The BPM main sign was also installed despite low initial approval for use of Thai-Isan-English signage once it was realized from the CPM example that approval for such signage, once installed, increased markedly. The BPM main sign is the most ornate of the high quality, permanent, main municipality signs. The border is the most ornate, the sign is set in a triptych emplacement which emphasizes the emblem of BPM, and the setting is within a red tile display with four turrets on a grass verge. The reading of the inscription is, as with most of the other signs, Thai-Thai Lao-English.

Figure 13. BPM municipal main. Source: ICMRP.

Place Semiotics	Interaction Order
I) Modality: Maximal color differentiation, i.e., use of gold relief script on black background (municipality sign)	I) Pictures:
	a) Code preference: Top to bottom code preference (Thai-*Tai Noi*-English)
II) Composition: Polarized top-bottom information in vertical triptych; set in horizontal triptychs with municipal symbol of MPM to left and right of middle main inscription; middle triptych set in ornate gold relief border; four turrets	b) Inscription: Angsana New-ThaiNoiMonwipa–Sanzettica 5 Heavy Expd? (Thai slightly larger); high permanence and durability (black tile in cement emplacement with ruddy tiles); new; very high quality; front lit at night
	c) Emplacement: contextualized (relationship with place), in front of entrance to BPM on grass verge
	d) Space: public, special use (municipal main sign)
III) Interactive participants: Producer – sign viewer / reader	e) Discourse: infrastructural, municipal public label (place); transgressive (use of Thai Lao)?

Figure 14. Geosemiotic analysis of ICMRP signage: BPM municipal main. Source: ICMRP.

The signs for all the children's libraries are essentially the same, though the three for the main libraries are larger than those for six community libraries. They employ the same color scheme as traditional Thai road signs and are the only signs to include the EU flag and an acknowledgment of EU support for the signage. Such acknowledgment would have appeared transgressive on the other signs. The library signs are also the most transgressive in that the Chinese and Thai Lao appear to be larger than the Thai. This was employed to compensate for the fact that the Chinese is lowest, thus would otherwise occupy a culturally 'low' value.

Figure 15. KKM main municipal library sign (within Kennakorn Lake Park). Source: ICMRP.

Place Semiotics	Interaction Order
I) Modality: Clear color differentiation; use of white script on sky blue background (similar to traditional Thai road signs) II) Composition: Polarized top-bottom information in four languages with additional acknowledgment 'Sign supported by the European Union' in white frame with municipal emblem in top left corner and EU flag in top right corner III) Interactive participants: Producer – sign viewer / reader	I) Pictures: a) Code preference: Top to bottom code preference (Thai-English-*Tai Noi*-Chinese) b) Inscription: Angsana New-Nimbus Sans L Regular–Unknown Thai Lao font–Unknown Chinese font (Chinese largest, Thai Lao next largest, Thai and English smallest); high permanence and durability (metal); new; high quality c) Emplacement: supported by two metal posts; contextualized (relationship with place) d) Space: public, special use (library) e) Discourse: infrastructural, municipal public label (library); transgressive (use of Thai Lao; large font size for Chinese)?

Figure 16. Geosemiotic analysis of ICMRP signage: Nine children's library signs.

Discussion

The design and installation of the signage over the four and a half years of the ICMRP occurred within the greater context of language policy and planning to enhance Thailand's compliance with its international human rights obligations regarding the Thai Lao (see Draper, 2013a). However, the following discussion will frame the multilingual signage of the ICMRP within another, relevant context, *community building,* which is founded on the notion of the *community* (Brown, 2004). Community building depends on the quality of relationships of the citizens within a community (Putnam, 2000) and should be founded on positive hopes and aspirations: "The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts, rather than one of problem solving, fear, and retribution" (Block, 2008:29).

Thailand is a member of the ASEAN regional community, which was founded with

the aim of creating a comprehensive, people-focused North Atlantic-style security community (Collins, 2013, ix-x). It has three main pillars, namely the political and security community, economic community, and socio-cultural community (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009, 1). The most relevant of these to the present study is the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC; ASEAN Secretariat, 2009, 2016a, 2016b). The ASEAN *Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint*, the foundation document for the ASCC, emerged from the 13th ASEAN Summit of November 2007 and was published in 2009. The Blueprint adopts a European Union-style 'unity in diversity' (e.g., see Bonciu, 2015) model (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009:1):

> The ASCC shall respect the different cultures, languages, and religions of the peoples of ASEAN, emphasise their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity and adapt them to present realities, opportunities and challenges.

Within this over-arching framework, the work of the ICMRP on multilingual signage within the urban setting is related to two main aspects of the ASCC, human development and building identity. Within the concept of human development, the use of Thai Lao on the signage is related to advancing and prioritizing education, the strategic objective for which reads as follows:

> Ensuring the integration of education priorities into ASEAN's development agenda and creating a knowledge based society; achieving universal access to primary education; promoting early child care and development; and enhancing awareness of ASEAN to youths through education and activities to build an ASEAN identity based on friendship and cooperation.

Under this objective, ICMRP multilingual signage complies with two recommended actions to be taken (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009:2):

- viii. Include the teaching of common values and cultural heritage in school curricula…
- xi. Support learning of ASEAN languages…

The introduction of Thai Lao multilingual signage would appear to stress common Thai-Lao values and cultural heritage, as well as support the learning of a fellow ASEAN language. Lao identity, language, and cultural heritage is part of the common, though at times disputed and contested, history of both Northeast Thailand and the Lao PDR (Keyes, 2014:16-17), and the Thai-Lao PDR relationship was historically one of the flashpoints of the Cold War (Ngaosyvathn and Ngaosyvathn, 1994). The use of a (draft) Thai national language policy (NLP; see Draper, Forthcoming b) to promote the learning of Thai languages of ASEAN countries to assist with transboundary issues such as commerce has already been raised (Person, 2012). However, while Lao is now an optional subject at KKU, the vast majority of schools in Northeast Thailand do not teach Lao or the Thai variant, Thai Lao. Certainly in transboundary areas, however, there would appear to be both commercial and community-building reasons for teaching Lao and Thai Lao, as well as for teaching shared Thai-Lao cultural heritage.

The identity building section of the ASCC Blueprint builds on this introduction.

Specifically, under the heading 'Promotion of ASEAN awareness and a sense of community,' the strategic objective is to

> Create a sense of belonging, consolidate unity in diversity and enhance deeper mutual understanding among ASEAN Member States about their culture, history, religion, and civilization. (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009:21)

The strategic objective is followed by 22 potential actions, though none of these specifically mention multilingual signage. Within the general framework of promoting ASEAN common values, cultural heritage, and languages, actions such as disseminating "ASEAN culture, social traditions and values, particularly among the young generation, through the media" and mobilising "the mass media and other cultural institutions to disseminate and share information on ASEAN culture, developments, accomplishments, benefits, and objectives to the people" (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009, 21-22) would appear to be related.

In addition, under the heading 'Preservation and promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage,' the strategic objective is to:

> Promote the conservation and preservation of ASEAN cultural heritage to ensure its continuity to enhance awareness and understanding of the people about the unique history of the region and the cultural similarities and differences between and among ASEAN Member States as well as to protect the distinctiveness of ASEAN cultural heritage as a whole (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009:22).

This strategic objective is followed by 14 actions (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009, 22). Again, though none specifically mention signage, there is one reference to supporting legislative policy in order to "protect, preserve and promote ASEAN cultural heritage and living traditions of each ASEAN Member State by 2015," which would include the draft Thai NLP. Additionally, one step is to "document and manage significant ASEAN cultural heritage in a whole of ASEAN context," which would seem to include the Tai Noi script and, via signage, an increased awareness of that script in traditional heritage contexts such as palm leaf manuscripts (Manmart, Chamnongsri, Wuwongse, and Sugimoto, 2012), as well as the ability of people to read those manuscripts. A further step concerns promoting "ASEAN civilization studies, including through collaboration between the ASEAN culture officials and the members of the AUN." The Lao civilization would appear to be a core component of ASEAN civilization studies due to the historical importance of the Lan Xang Lao empire (see Stuart-Fox, 1998) and its successors. Another action is to "promote cultural tourism and the development of related industries by establishing working relations between and among the ASEAN culture and tourism officials and the private sector." In this context, it is important to recognise that many local people believe that reviving the script in official signage would promote cultural tourism (Draper, 2016b, 843). Furthermore, one action is to "develop national capabilities in the promotion, management and preservation of traditional cultural heritage and non-traditional cultural heritage such as audio-

visuals." Traditional cultural heritage would certainly include signage featuring the Thai Lao language in the Tai Noi script. Finally, there is an action to "Encourage community participation in preservation cultural heritage through mass media," and outdoor mass media includes signs (McDermott and Albrecht, 2002).

Conclusion

The implications of the ICMRP multilingual signage action suggests the draft NLP (Draper, Forthcoming b) promotes regional ethnic languages and identity through official, multilingual signage, including road signs, route signs, place signs, and municipal signs, in line with the ICMRP's framework for language policy and planning. This would improve the human rights situation (see Draper, 2013a) as well as the Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Thai Lao (see Draper, 2010). This paper has presented the ICMRP signage within a broad discourse of place and argues one further reason for including Thai Lao in the form of a heritage script, Tai Noi, in multilingual signage, is ASCC community building.

The ASCC approach to community building was recently updated, in the form of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a). In contrast to the previous blueprint, there is an emphasis on the concept of inclusion, which is at the heart of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10.2 (United Nations, 2015):

By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

Inclusion is also of crucial importance for supporting the economic, social, and political development of the Thai Lao (Draper, Forthcoming a). Inclusion, the blueprint notes, should be extended to support for 'ethnic minority groups,' (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a, 6) and be based on a life-cycle approach, in adherence with rights-based principles. In other words, we can see the human rights of large, regional ethnic minority communities within ASEAN, such as the Thai Lao, beginning to dovetail with the concept of inclusion within ASCC planning documents.

In particular, the new blueprint argues for the reduction of barriers to inclusion and for "inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels with special attention to the needs of those in disadvantaged situations, including ethnic minority groups" (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a, 8). Under human rights, the blueprint also calls for

regional initiatives and stakeholder participation to promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination–institutionalised or otherwise–exploitation, trafficking, harmful practices, and violence and abuse against… ethnic minority groups… (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a, 9).

The multilingual signage aspect of the ICMRP, with its emphasis on large-scale

attitudinal surveying (Draper and Prasertsri, 2013, Draper 2016b), represents the 'bleeding edge' of inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making regarding Thailand's urban landscape, building on the earlier KKM Sinsai initiative, another participatory project which promoted lamp-posts and statues of Thai Lao culture heroes (Brereton, 2012).

As such, the ICMRP multilingual signage initiative is potentially a blueprint for the entirety of Northeast Thailand to reduce racialized discrimination against the Thai Lao (see Draper, Forthcoming a) via language policy and planning in the urban environment. Some indication of the power of a participatory approach to enhancing the urban landscape to reflect the ethnic communities who live within it can be seen in the reaction of His Excellency Dr Thongloun Sisoulit, Prime Minister of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, on a visit to COLA, Khon Kaen University, on July 6, 2016. After viewing the ICMRP semi-permanent exhibition at COLA and the results of the KKM Sinsai initiative, he noted the trip to COLA and its exhibits were "beyond my expectations" (Sisoulit, reception speech, July 6, 2016).

Whether the blueprint can be expanded and taken up within national planning, such as the draft NLP, now depends on the quality of the Thai civilization, especially respect for the concept of choice and the engendering of trust:

Unity in diversity is the highest possible attainment of a civilization, a testimony to the most noble possibilities of the human race. This attainment is made possible through passionate concern for choice, in an atmosphere of social trust. (Michael Novak, quoted in Davis, 2015, 8)

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