



## Report

**2021**



The University of Manchester

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# **Inclusivity and Authenticity in Manchester's Local-Chinese Community in Chinatown**

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## 1 Introduction

Street signs play a crucial role in forming language communities, as they are visible immediately on entering the area (Rasinger, 2018). Especially in a multilingual city, like Manchester, street signs are highly indicative of community areas. Therefore, we can consider a community as a socially constructed product. We do not consider a community according to language boundaries but instead follow Blommaert's definition of communities as "communities of practice", "institutions" and "networks" (and) as the often mobile and flexible sites and links in which representations of the group emerge, move and circulate (Blommaert, 2011). This definition allows us to consider the roles of different actors in the community. We will further discuss the notion of community in this study.

In this research, we are interested in how the local-Chinese-speaking community creates a community in Manchester's Chinatown. Therefore, to avoid confusion, we will use the term "Chinese-speaking-community" to refer to this local community. Also, it is essential to note that every time we refer to the Chinese language, we are referring to Mandarin Chinese unless we state otherwise.

Amos (2016) argues that the linguistic landscape of Chinatown seeks to boost its social profile and attract foreign visitors. Due to this performative nature and commodification, no Chinatown can be authentic (Amos, 2016). Considering this argument, we set out to ask the following research questions:

1. Which role do restaurants play in the formation of the local Chinese community in Manchester?
2. Can this community be described as an authentic representation of Chineseness?

Furthermore, we can consider food as an entry point into a community. Hence it is interesting to consider what role restaurants play in including and excluding people from a particular community: in our case, Manchester's Chinatown. We will analyse whether Manchester's Chinatown is an inclusive or exclusive community (Gaiser & Matras, 2016).

Manchester's Chinatown serves as a valuable area for this study as it is one of the main tourist attractions in Manchester, while at the same time attracting more Chinese migrants every year. This area showed the highest population increase for the Chinese community from 2001-2011 (+1900 residents) (Bullen, 2015).

We will also use the following studies from the literature review of our research proposal to support our arguments: Huebner (2006); Arnaut, Blommaert, Rampton, and Spotti (2015); Cenoz and Gorter (2006); Cook (2015); Coupland and Garrett (2010).

## **2 Methodology**

To investigate the role restaurant owners play in community formation, we decided to conduct interviews with restaurants in Chinatown. We have been able to conduct three interviews via telephone; hence no transcript can be displayed. After not receiving any answers to email requests asking them to participate in the study, we made this decision. We attempted to have the three interviewees sign consent forms via email, but they did not return them, so we acquired verbal consent via telephone when conducting the interviews.

The three restaurants we focus on provide good insight into different approaches: one store, HappyLemon, is part of a global chain, while The New Emperor is an independent local restaurant. Ban Di Bul adds another dimension to our study of community, as this is a Korean restaurant operating in a predominantly Chinese area. These restaurants will allow us to gain an insight into exclusivity and inclusivity in the Chinese community in Manchester's Chinatown.

Due to the pandemic, we had to change our initial research question, as stated in the research proposal. Initially, we were interested in investigating the different strategies taken by the Chinese and the Urdu community, and comparing their approaches. As a result of the pandemic, many restaurants in the area we considered for the Urdu community, Levenshulme, closed down. We could not conduct interviews with community members, and finding reliable data from this community was severely impacted by the lockdown restrictions, which were in place during our study period. We then decided to focus on the Chinese community and adapt our research question with a more in-depth focus on the role of restaurant owners and the question of authenticity within this community.

To get a more reliable impression of the local-Chinese-speaking community, we compare the interview answers to the restaurant signs available on the LinguaSnapp (2021) app. We further analyse these images and interview results with the online representations of the businesses. These include their Facebook page, website, and/or availability on food apps. These three tools help us in forming a conclusive image of the local-Chinese-speaking community in Manchester.

We will use photos of restaurant signage, data from interviews, and arguments and gaps from relevant literature to answer our research questions.

### 3 Findings

To answer our research questions, we set out to analyse the signs of three restaurants, HappyLemon, The New Emperor, and Ban Di Bul. Even though Ban Di Bul is a Korean-style restaurant, we will consider it in our study due to its proximity to Chinatown. We will compare these signs to the interviews we conducted and the online representations of each respective business.

#### 3.1 HappyLemon

##### 3.1.1 Sign Analysis

The BubbleTea store HappyLemon shows an emblematic use of Chinese. The restaurant uses Chinese almost exclusively in advertisements. However, interestingly they chose not to use any Chinese letters on their facade. Here, their name is only in English, with a cartoon face complementing it, which customers can easily associate with Chinese comics and art.



(Figure 1)

HappyLemon positions itself as a globalised brand. With English as the dominant language, they communicate an inclusive approach. Their primary use of English on their signage suggests an outward orientation (Gaiser & Matras, 2016). Thus the store does not exclusively cater to the Chinese community. Their use of Chinese in the store shows their acceptance of the Chinese dominance in the area and fits their identity as an Asian-presenting brand. Another factor that proves their global approach to attracting customers is that most of their stores worldwide are located in or near the Chinatown of the respective city. This factor suggests that they wish to connect to the Chinese community while not exclusively catering to them.



(Figure 2)

The posters searching for new staff members only use Chinese. This observation is interesting. Because of the previous examples, one could expect at least a mixture of English and Chinese. This approach for recruiting staff suggests a more exclusive approach. It suggests that they wish to stay connected to the Chinese-speaking community and offer them income sources despite their inclusive approach.

### 3.1.2 Signs compared to Interview and Website

We can observe a coherent approach when comparing HappyLemon's signage and their interview answers. The staff primarily use English and Chinese, which the signs reflect. HappyLemon further conveys their global approach online. English maintains dominance both on the HappyLemon Facebook page and website while using Chinese emblematically, not to convey new information.

Overall, we can deduce that HappyLemon seeks to maintain the authenticity of their language community to attract non-Chinese-speaking and Chinese-speaking customers alike.

### 3.1.3 Findings

As Amos (2016) observes, restaurants frequently use signage to construct exotic and foreign places to attract visitors. We can observe this idea in the signage of HappyLemon. The signage seems to attract non-Chinese-speaking tourists who want to experience Asian cuisine by using English dominantly. The omission of Chinese characters on the facade facilitates the

understanding for non-Chinese-speaking visitors. At the same time, having the cartoon associated with Chinese art of a face on the sign allows the name 'HappyLemon' to maintain a connection to Asian culture and art. Thus the owners do not seek only to attract Chinese-speaking locals, as Chinese symbols would suffice for that purpose. The signage does not use Chinese to construct an exclusive community but opens up and includes foreign visitors.

From this analysis, we can infer that HappyLemon's signage uses a commodified Chineseness (Gaiser & Matras, 2016). The restaurant commodifies the Chinese language to attract non-Chinese-speaking visitors, using their signs in a commercial frame rather than a community frame (Rasinger, S.M. 2018). Amos (2016) argues that no Chinatown can be authentic while attracting outside visitors. HappyLemon serves as an example of this argument. Therefore, we question if we can consider Manchester's Chinatown an authentic language community while it has globalised restaurants like HappyLemon in its area.

### 3.2 New Emperor

#### 3.2.1 Sign Analysis

The New Emperor is a Cantonese cuisine-based Chinese restaurant. It is an independent local restaurant, so the language choices are primarily made to cater to the local community. The restaurant's name on its sign is in Traditional Chinese and English. Bilingual signs of Traditional Chinese and English take the dominant position in the restaurant, suggesting that they target both Chinese-speaking and non-Chinese-speaking customers.



(Figure 3)

The Chinese name of the restaurant uses a golden glossy font and is embedded on a red background with golden lace to highlight Chinese characteristics. Chinese paintings, window grilles, couplets, and other decorations reminiscent of Chinese elements also adorn the walls. The intention may be to create a 'sense of home' for Chinese-speaking diners looking for hometown delicacies and a sense of authenticity for non-Chinese-speaking diners who want to experience authentic Cantonese cuisine. The restaurant only uses traditional Chinese for the discount sign, which conveys an exclusive approach. However, the sign also marks the restaurant's address and contact information in English and colour prints the pictures of the dishes, suggesting that they still intend to attract potential non-Chinese-speaking customers. The wifi notice is only in English, but it also prints the restaurant's name in simplified Chinese. This notice looks comparatively newer, so the restaurant might have constructed it later than the other signs.



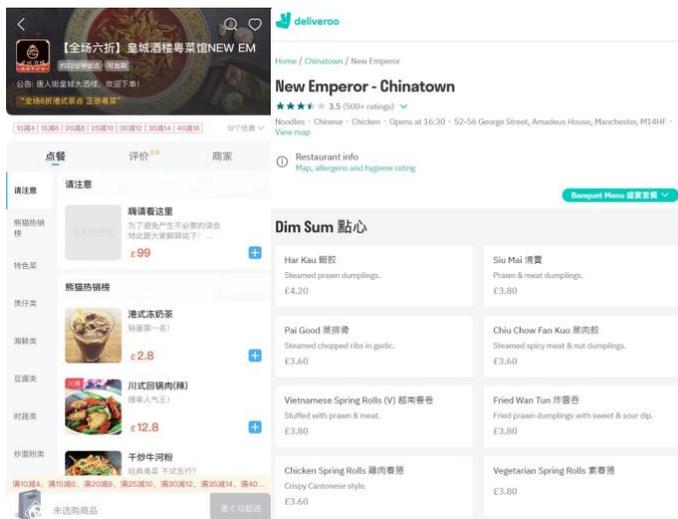
(Figure 4)

### 3.2.2 Signs compared to interviews and websites

We see coherence when comparing the language use on signs with the interview answers. According to the staff's answers, English and Chinese are the languages they use for restaurant signs and daily communication. The New Emperor does not have an independent website but appears on Hungry Panda, a Chinese food delivery platform. On this platform, all restaurant information and menus are in Chinese, exclusively catering to Chinese customers.

Additionally, almost all customer reviews are in Chinese. Interestingly, the restaurant responds to these comments in English, regardless of the language the customers used to leave the comment, which is interesting because, from our interview answers, we know the staff also uses Chinese. These exchanges suggest that the restaurant or the staff in charge of customer service expect their customers to understand English.

In addition to Hungry Panda, The New Emperor also caters on Deliveroo, a popular delivery platform that reaches wider audiences and provides food of several different categories and cuisines. The New Emperor predominantly uses English on this platform, with Chinese translations attached to the names of the dishes. The variety of language usage on these two platforms shows the strategic use of language to address different target audiences.



(Figure 5)

### 3.2.3 Findings

Cook (2015) stresses the impact sign materials have on readers' perceptions. She suggests that the definition of signs largely depends on its materials, primarily when signs also function as identity symbols, such as with The New Emperor's signage and its use of Chinese decorative elements to portray their Chinese identity. The Chinese signboard conveys a sense of Chinese identity, providing a sense of authenticity. Therefore, The New Emperor predominantly uses an inwards-oriented (Gaiser & Matras, 2016) approach to maintain its language community identity.

## 3.3 Ban Di Bul

### 3.3.1 Sign Analysis

Ban Di Bul is a Korean-style restaurant located in Princess Street in Manchester, near Chinatown. Its signage predominantly caters to non-Chinese and non-Korean speaking communities for the

following reasons. Their main entry point sign says "Ban Di Bul: Korean Restaurant" with the restaurant's phone number above it. There is also some Korean writing on the side of the restaurant windows. However, a customer does not need to read this to know any essential information about the restaurant because they are decorations: language which the restaurant uses emblematically, or which Amos (2016) would refer to as 'performative.'

The menus are also an interesting case. They are bilateral: one side is in English with Korean-to-English transliteration, while the other is Chinese and Korean. This distinction is notable because the English side is more descriptive than the Chinese or Korean, showing that people who only speak English might need more descriptions of the dish since they do not commonly see them in their culture, while Korean or Chinese speaking customers might be more familiar with them.

However, the specials menu is written mainly in English and Korean-to-English transliteration, with small Korean writing on the side of each transliteration, excluding Chinese writing. The arrangement of the specials menu indicates that English is the prioritized language of the restaurant, suggesting that the owners want to cater to several communities outside of the Korean and Chinese speaking communities.



(Figure 6)

### 3.3.2 Signs compared to interview and website



(Figure 7 above)



(Figure 8)

The Ban Di Bul website shows a logo that says "authentic Korean restaurant." Also, the construction "ban di bul" does not translate into Korean, but the construction "bandibul" does. Therefore, the transliteration the restaurant uses is not exact. The transliteration may be separated into three parts to appear more palatable and readable to non-Korean-speaking customers, primarily speakers of Indo-European languages, since these languages tend to be vastly different from Korean and Chinese. If we had realized this distinction before conducting the interviews, it would have been helpful to ask a question about it to the restaurant owners.

The website is written wholly in English, conveying that it is made mainly for non-Korean-speaking customers. According to the interviewees' answers, the restaurant staff uses several languages: English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, Korean, and customers use English and Chinese to communicate with the staff. These answers show that the signs are effective for

attracting English and Chinese speakers. Since the restaurant also hires Spanish-speaking staff, it likely attracts customers from many diverse language communities.

### **3.3.3 Findings**

The English language seems to be prioritized in Ban Di Bul, suggesting that the restaurant uses an outwards-oriented approach (Gaiser & Matras, 2016) to attract non-Chinese-speaking customers. As we see with their signage and menus, Korean takes a back seat, and so does Chinese, appearing even less. This observation suggests that even though the restaurant is Korean, it promotes audience inclusivity to attract more customers (Amos, 2016). Therefore, Ban Di Bul's goal when attracting customers is to draw in as many as possible, no matter the language community.

## **4 Discussion**

The three restaurants we have analyzed in this report use an outwards-oriented approach (Gaiser & Matras, 2016) via their signage. However, one of the restaurants shows traces of a more exclusive, inwards-oriented (Gaiser & Matras, 2016).

Even though all three restaurants use more than one language on their signage, HappyLemon and Ban Di Bul seem to cater principally to non-Chinese-speaking customers. For example, to eat at HappyLemon, a customer does not need to speak or read Chinese because the signage uses it emblematically. Ban Di Bul adopts the same strategy. The signage uses Korean and Chinese either emblematically or to repeat something said in English. For these reasons, Happy Lemon and Ban Di Bul aim to attract tourists from several communities.

The New Emperor, however, seems to remain closer to the Chinese-speaking community than its counterparts. This notion suggests that The New Emperor caters to non-Chinese-speaking communities while remaining predominantly exclusive to the Chinese-speaking community. Amos's (2016) notion that restaurants in Chinatown will all be predominantly inclusive due to its 'globalised commodification' contradicts this analysis. However, The New Emperor Challenges this, since we can clearly deduce its inwards-oriented approach from its signage.

An essential notion in our research is that of community. Previous studies call "into question the boundaries of a speech community" (Huebner, 2006: 50). We consider the question of authenticity and how Amos (2016) argues that Chinatown, a language community, cannot be genuinely authentic while it caters to non-Chinese-speakers and that the rise of globalization can

diminish authenticity (Amos, 2016). However, using the notion of super-diversity (Arnaut, Blommaert, Rampton & Spotti, eds. 2015), we can consider non-Chinese-speaking visitors an essential part of the Chinatown language community. Even though restaurants may use the commercial frame rather than the community frame (Rasinger, 2018), Chinatown's global presentation is a vital part of its identity as there is "no reason to invoke absolute standards of cultural authenticity" (Coupland & Garrett, 2010: 24), reframing the boundaries of language communities.

We did not include the notion of top-down/bottom-up signs (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006) in our research since the restaurants we analyzed are private-owned (bottom-up). Therefore, there is no distinction to be made with this notion.

## **5 Conclusion**

We conclude that Ban Di Bul and Happy Lemon do not directly contribute to the formation of an authentic Chinese community because these two restaurants mainly cater to non-Chinese-speaking customers. However, to answer the first research question, we argue that the restaurants' effort to stay connected to the Chinese-speaking community and attract other language communities is an essential part of its community formation. Meanwhile, the New Emperor usually favours Chinese, showing that it caters mainly to the Chinese-speaking community. This restaurant follows a more exclusive approach than the other two. These methods of exclusion and inclusion contribute to both expanding the community and restricting it.

To answer the second research question, with regards to the authenticity of Manchester's Chinatown, we can conclude that the non-Chinese-speaking visitors of Chinatown form an essential part of the community. As we mentioned in the introduction, Manchester's Chinatown is a major tourist attraction while at the same time attracting more Chinese migrants every year. Consequently, its identity is already associated with non-Chinese-speaking actors, and its identity is its authenticity. Therefore, we argue that Chinatown needs both outwards-oriented and inwards-oriented approaches to maintain authenticity.

We are aware that a community has unclear boundaries, but we have used the term critically in our study and opine that researchers should continue to question the notion. Therefore, we invite future research to continue investigating the definition we have outlined in this study.

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## 7 Appendix

### Interview

We presented the interview questions in our research proposal, so we will not be presenting them here. We conducted the interviews via telephone with no voice recording. Therefore, we do not have a transcript to provide here either.

### Further Pictures

#### Happy Lemon:



# Ban Di Bul:

KOREAN TRADITIONAL SOUP		
59. 우거지갈비탕 牛舌菜脯骨湯	U GU JI GAR BI TANG Beef Spine Ribs and Dry Chives Cabbage in Soup with Rice	£8.90
60. 갈비탕 排骨湯	GAR BI TANG Beef Spine Ribs in Soup with Rice	£8.90
61. 삼계탕 人參雞湯	SAM GE TANG Chicken Soup with Ginseng	£19.00
62. 설렁탕 牛舌炖湯	SEL LENG TANG Plain Noodles in Black Clear Beef Soup & Rice	£8.90
63. 고깃국물 牛舌湯	GGO BI GUM TANG Oxtail Soup with Rice	£8.90
64. 불고기 떡볶이 牛柳飯炒麵	BUGOGI DUKBEGI <b>Reddish Dish!</b> Bulgogi with Yemeri Noodles and Vegetables (No Rice)	£8.90
65. 순두부찌개 韓式豆腐湯	SUN DU BU JI GAE Spicy Soft Tofu Bean Curd with Seefood Soup and Rice	£8.90
66. 순두부찌개 豆腐湯	DWEN JANG JI GAE Soy Bean Paste with Bean Curd Soup and Rice	£8.90
67. 순김치찌개 泡菜湯	KIM CHI JI GAE Spicy Kimchi & Bean Curd with Pork & Rice	£8.90
68. 떡국 糯米肉湯	YOK GAE JANG Spicy Beef & Vegetables Soup with Rice	£8.90

Vegetarian Dishes Available

# Specials Menu

<p><b>BBO Tasting Set</b> £27.50 Per Person (Min 2 people) Incorporate Steaks, Stir-fry, Spring Roll</p> <p>YONK KE JANG SOUP 육계장수 / MI YOEK SOUP 미역국 x 2 Choice of Spicy Beef Soup or Clear Seaweed Soup</p> <p>KIMCHI SET 오뎀 김치 A Set of Korean Traditional Pickled Vegetables (Cabbage/Cucumber/Radish)</p> <p>MODUM GUI 조림 구이 An Extensive Selection of BBQ meat including: Marbled Beef, Marinated Beef, Pork Belly, Spicy Pork, Beef Tongue, Beef Ribs, Marinated Chicken</p> <p>HAE MUL PA CHUN 해물파전 Pan Fried Pancake with Seafod &amp; Spring Chives</p> <p>SERVED WITH: SANG CHU 상추 (Fresh Lettuce to wrap the meat) PAE-O-RI 표절이 (Sweet &amp; Sour Spring Onion) BUB MY (A Bowl of Rice) &amp; Assorted Dipping Sauce</p>	<p><b>BBO Set 2</b> £23.90 Per Person (Min 2 people)</p> <p>YONK KE JANG SOUP 육계장수 / MI YOEK SOUP 미역국 x 2 Choice of Spicy Beef Soup or Clear Seaweed Soup</p> <p>KIMCHI SET 오뎀 김치 A Set of Korean Traditional Pickled Vegetables (Cabbage/Cucumber/Radish)</p> <p>BUL GO GI 불고기 Skirt &amp; Marinated Beef</p> <p>SAM GIEM SAL 삼겹살 Skirt Pork Belly with Pepper and Scallion Sauce</p> <p>YANG NEUM DAK GUI 양념닭구이 Chicken with Red Pepper Seasoned Soy Sauce</p> <p>BU SEOK YA CHAEPO KUM 배춧속이채볶음 Fried Seaweed Mushroom &amp; Vegetables</p> <p>SERVED WITH: SANG CHU 상추 (Fresh Lettuce to wrap the meat) PAE-O-RI 표절이 (Sweet &amp; Sour Spring Onion) BUB MY (A Bowl of Rice) &amp; Assorted Dipping Sauce</p>
<p><b>Ban Di Bul Special Set</b> £20.90 Per Person (Min 2 people)</p> <p>YONK KE JANG SOUP 육계장수 / MI YOEK SOUP 미역국 x 2 Choice of Spicy Beef Soup or Clear Seaweed Soup</p> <p>KIMCHI SET 오뎀 김치 A Set of Korean Traditional Pickled Vegetables (Cabbage/Cucumber/Radish)</p> <p>BUL GO GI 불고기 Marinated BBQ Beef Served on a Skilling Plate</p> <p>KAN PUNG KI 캔퐁기 Deep Fried Chicken with Spicy Sauce</p> <p>HAE MUL PA CHUN 해물파전 Pan Fried Pancake with Seafod &amp; Spring Chives</p> <p>DOL SOT BI BIM BUB 돌솥비빔밥 Beef and Assorted Vegetables in a Stone Hot Bowl (Choice of Beef, Pork, Chicken or Vegetarian Assailable)</p>	<p><b>Seafood Set</b> £21.90 Per Person (Min 2 people)</p> <p>YONK KE JANG SOUP 육계장수 / MI YOEK SOUP 미역국 x 2 Choice of Spicy Beef or Clear Seaweed Soup</p> <p>KIMCHI SET 오뎀 김치 A Set of Korean Traditional Pickled Vegetables (Cabbage/Cucumber/Radish)</p> <p>HAE MUL MAR CHUN 해물마린편 Pan Fried Pancake with Seafod &amp; Spring Chives</p> <p>YEON A GU I 연어구이 Roasted Salmon with Teriyaki Sauce on a Skilling Plate</p> <p>O JING O PO KUM 오징어볶음 Fried Squid with Vegetables &amp; Red Pepper Paste Sauce</p> <p>DOL SOT BI BIM BUB 돌솥비빔밥 Beef and Assorted Vegetables in a Stone Hot Bowl (Choice of Beef, Pork, Chicken or Vegetarian Assailable)</p>



(Map displaying the location of, and Chinese signage of Manchester's Chinatown)