

# Integrating Regional Culture into Public Art within the Metro Public Space

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**Abstract:** Chinese artists with the development of China's economy and the accelerated construction of urbanization, public art expresses the collective consciousness and mainstream emotions in the process of China's social development. Seeking to express the revival and mutation of traditional culture in a proper artistic language, people hope to express their aspirations for the times through public art. China's urban subway public art is a typical manifestation of public art in the current stage of China's development, and has traveled with every important period of China's reform process, recording the traces of the times with works of art. China's subway public art has been diversified from the initial single form of expression, but there are still many shortcomings and problems, waiting for our artists and art workers to explore, China's subway public art to the world. China's urban subway public art has a successful case, but there is also the phenomenon of serious commercialization. China's urban subway public art has become an important platform for the historical heritage of the Chinese nation. The development of urban subway makes our urban public art more and more recognized by the public.

**Keywords:** Public Art; Cultural Memory; Public Participation.

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## 1. Introduction

With the continuous progress of China's contemporary society and the rapid development of economic level, urban transformation has turned the world upside down, and this change is not only the constant change of the landscape in the memory for people, but also the change of people's life and culture, aesthetics and emotion at the same time. Subway as one of the most important public transportation in people's travel, each country is competing to extend the art and culture full of their own regional cultural characteristics to the underground, so that the subway station has become an important platform for the display of public art in the city. When people pass by the subway station every day, these works of art are always reflected in their eyes, whether they are passengers or passers-by unconsciously and naturally interested in these works, which is the reflection of the subway public art in life.

Public art in China is a new art form that has emerged along with urbanization, and is composed of three elements: public, local, and artistic. From the point of view of the composition of the term "public art", "publicity" is the first thing that public art works need to satisfy. Wang Zhong once proposed: "The public space freely participated and recognized by the public is called 'public space', however, 'public art' refers to the artistic creation and corresponding environmental design in this kind of public space. "[1] In this way, it seems that public art does not only serve to decorate the space, but to create a space for public participation, a form of collaborative art. Then how to use art as an entry point to form the interaction and participation between the work and the public is a problem that contemporary public art needs to be solved urgently.

## 2. Public Art and Regional Culture

Public art must abide by many principles: its viewing angle with people; the mood with people's neighborhood; the relationship between him and the city and architecture. It is

part of the city, part of the urban public environment. Since public spaces are large in scale, many countries, led by the United States, produced a wide selection of installation-like works in the 1950s, and later, after the Pop movement in the 1960s, there was a lot of popular participation in the works, which produced many cross-boundary things that interacted with people.

Memory is not intangible, but materialized. For a city, our memories are always associated with landmarks, specialty foods, and human heritage, and it is these shared regional cultural memories that build a collective identity. As a visual epic, public art is unique in its significance as a carrier of information that has been in constant cumulative motion throughout history, recording the history behind the visual world and truly insinuating the evolution of history. First of all, it is a visual record of the cityscape and customs at a certain stage of history; secondly, public art has been a governmental act throughout the ages, and through the verification of its creation, it can be analyzed from the side of the political economy, organizational mechanism, cultural concepts and other information of the past generations, in addition to its incomparable artistic significance, in many ways, it has become an important and even the only information for us to understand the history of today. Then the fusion of regional culture and cultural memory reconstruction and mutual reinforcement, for the creation of public art has opened up a new path of development.

## 3. Public Art and the Development History of Subway Public Art

### 3.1. Current Status of Public Art in China

China's contemporary public art and the reform and opening up is the synchronous development. 1979 October, in China's capital airport by Zhang Ding, Yuan Yunfu, Yuan Yunsheng and other artists created a large-scale mural group. Among them, Yuan Yunsheng's work "Water Splashing Festival - Hymn of Life" (Fig. 1) received widespread attention due to the presence of three nude Dai maidens

bathing in the picture, and the interrelationship between art and the public attracted attention in the fields of sculpture, mural painting and architecture. Overseas media claimed that "China's appearance of women's bodies on the walls of public places heralds the opening up of the country in the true sense of the word." [2] Thus the completion of the Capital Airport mural became a milestone in modern Chinese public art.



**Figure 1.** "Water Splashing Festival - Hymn of Life"

China's earliest start by the Soviet Union's influence on urban cultural construction of the carrier is mainly "urban sculpture", in 1982, the China Art Association submitted "on the key cities in the country to carry out urban sculpture proposals", the proposal was approved by the central government, and the establishment of a national city sculpture construction to Mr. Liu Kaiqu as the head of the steering group of the construction of urban sculpture. [3] Later, influenced by Taiwan, Taiwan in 1992, the percentage of public art legislation, "Cultural Arts Scholarship Regulations", and in 1994, a large number of public art books, into the mainland, so that many mainland artists began to understand the term "public art", but in the early days of public art is only considered to be a stylized body, a beautification of the city. However, in the early days, public art was only regarded as a kind of stylized body, a kind of beautification of the city. Around 2000, a large number of artists began to integrate the concept of public art with culture, history and society. The concept of public art began to spread rapidly in China, and more and more cities began to emphasize the role of public art in urban public space. Along with the economic development, the combination of public art with urban construction and commercial consumption has led to the prosperous development of public art.

However, because China's public art is largely determined by policy makers, unlike in the West where a public artwork has to be validated by the legislature, the so-called legislature is the public opinion body, which often reflects the ideas of the people, China's contemporary public art has fewer chances for public participation, and therefore doesn't reflect to a large extent the sentiment of public participation. In addition, the sculpture is generally too expensive, too much huge advertising art, we need to understand that public art is just to improve the people's activity space and aesthetic vision, not the art of luxury nor the emperor's art. A large number of public art was introduced into the city construction.

### **3.2. The Current Situation of Public Art in Subway**

Public transportation has always been an important part of urban life, public art has always been an important part of public space, in 1600, when the first rental carriages appeared in the streets of London, which opened the curtain of the world's public transportation. On January 10, 1863, the London Underground - Metropolitan Line opened, which was the world's first subway. Forty thousand passengers rode the

line on its opening day, and by 1880, the expanded Metropolitan Railway was carrying 40 million passengers a year, becoming a new relationship between art and the public. The public artwork of the subway is not so much a work of art as a platform to connect with the public, a cultural intention that remains in people's hearts and minds, telling the moving stories of the city, and enabling the expression of a city to blossom into a friendlier one.

China's first subway, the Beijing Subway, was commissioned in January 1971, more than forty years ago, and during these long decades there have been different forms of artistic expression at different points in time. Early subway art is mainly for the art is decorated space, like there is a specific theme museum culture; in the present subway public art is mainly advocated by the art to create space, so that the space art or art space, so that the two become a whole; in the future the subway is more and more as an important part of the life of the urban people, how its art and the residents of the city to happen a close relationship will be In the future, the subway will become more and more important as an important part of urban life, and how its art will have a close relationship with the city residents will become more and more important. Therefore, public art in the subway should activate our space, become an incubator of new culture, and constantly release the possibility of new culture, and the cultural memories of the city contained in the public art will let the viewers evoke their personal memories, so that the public will have a sense of belonging.

### **3.3. Problems Facing the Development of Subway Public Art**

Over the past 40 years, the main form of public art in China's subway is mostly murals, due to the limitations of the comprehensive national strength and the quality of citizens, murals as public art, has not fully realized its public nature and fairness. It is difficult to see good public murals in daily life. Art for most Chinese people, still belongs to the life outside the luxury. So when we look at the public artworks in subway stations in China, it is not difficult to find that there are very few public artworks when we walk in every subway. Green and colorful commercial advertisements abound and cover the sky, and there is almost no art in people's vision. In terms of policy, public art in the subway lacks the support of government policy. Urban public art is a modern western import for China, and it has not yet formed a perfect art system in China to play a full social function. In terms of publicity, most of the subway murals lack thinking and investigation on the public's aesthetic interest and acceptance psychology, which makes them as public artworks but not public. In terms of culture, the current domestic subway mural works exist in the region, the loss of ethnicity and the lack of traditional culture. Along with the wave of globalization, the simple architectural style of the West has greatly influenced the construction of Chinese cities, and along with the phenomenon of "one side of a thousand cities", a large number of public works of art have been treated as art processing products and thus copied and pasted.

## **4. Cases of Subway Public Art Based on Regional Culture**

### **4.1. Beijing Metro Line 8**

As a typical subway public art in China, the Beijing Memory Public Art Program at Tongluoguxiang Station of

Beijing Line 8 breaks through the spatial limitations of traditional subway public art, and takes advantage of a variety of mediums, new technologies and other forms to let art and the public interact with the city, and really let art activate the space.

Nanluoguxiang is located in the Dongcheng District of Beijing, which was first built in the Yuan Dynasty and is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Beijing, with original hutong style and many interesting small stores. The unique fusion of tradition and fashion has made Nanluoguxiang a unique charm and flavor, and has made Nanluoguxiang an important fashion landmark in Beijing, as well as one of the "Top 25 Interesting Destinations in Asia" selected by TIME Magazine in the United States.

As a key station for public art in the Beijing subway network, the creation of public art at Nanluoguxiang subway station carries the important task of promoting Beijing culture and reflecting the humanistic temperament and spiritual connotation of Nanluoguxiang. The whole work takes "Beijing - Memory" (Figure 2) as the starting point, uses the traditional glaze casting technology to seal every small object that contains the cultural memory of old Beijing, and uses about 4,000 amber-like glaze pieces to present the characteristic human heritage and local customs of old Beijing, such as Walking birds, pulling carts, selling art in the streets, etc. The fragmented individual memories are reassembled into a whole picture and uplifted to group memories. The important thing is that each glazed block collects a small object of an old Beijing ordinary person. In fact, these small objects, no matter which era they are from, no matter what they are, whether a thimble, food stamps, radio, former park tickets or an abacus bead, etc., the important thing is that there is a lot of information in them, that is, a real life portrayal of the city life. With the influence of the subway's huge flow of people, the seed of old Beijing's memory is implanted in people's hearts, arousing people's emotions and memories of the humanistic life in old Beijing.

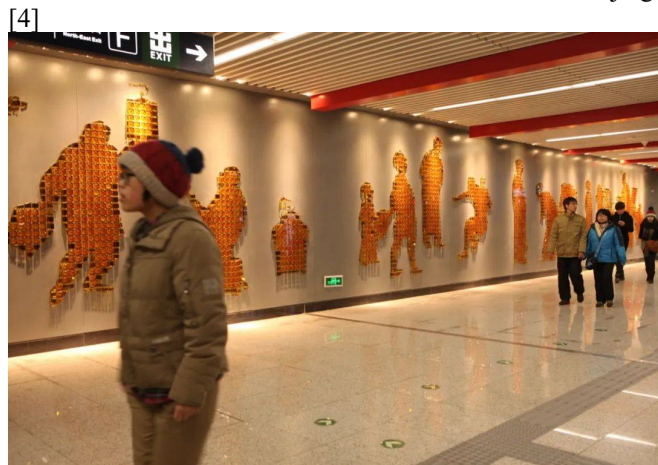


Figure 2. "Beijing - Memory"

With the rapid development of the economy, the process of urbanization in China is now developing very rapidly, and the cultural lineage of many cities has disappeared, the most important thing is the kinship between people and people. In the former life or in the daily scene, we will receive love and care from very many people, experience a hutong, a compound is actually a big family, however, today's society gradually become indifferent between neighbors, this human and human affection and so beautiful memories should be retained in our city, so the artist seals these small objects with

stories in small glazed blocks put on the Therefore, the artist seals these small objects with stories in small glass blocks and puts QR codes on them, so that commuters can scan them and see the stories belonging to these small objects on the internet. This kind of public artwork will continue to tell the story of the city, its history, for 50 or even 100 years. A work like "Beijing Memory" transcends the essence of artwork, and becomes a new orientation between art and public, art and society, art and life.

#### 4.2. Hangzhou Metro Line 1

In 2012, the subway appeared in Hangzhou, a beautiful and affluent environment on the land, a poetic underground public art context was presented in front of everyone's eyes, the Xizi Lake, the people and the spirit of the land, in this side of the land of the art atmosphere, the designers to "a line of an expression, ten lines of the cityscape, a story of a battle, a hundred battles a history." For the design planning. Eventually, open the door to the Hangzhou Metro public art, pull open a never-ending exhibition, so that public art in the public space blooming color. Hangzhou subway public space, but also through the way of art to show us the story of urban change. Hangzhou Metro Line 1 has a total of 15 stations, each of which interprets a unique story, and the design of the 15 stations is both intertwined and distinctive. By integrating the city's folk culture, human heritage and landmarks into the public art design, the "art form" serves as a medium to stimulate Hangzhou's cultural memory and continue the city's cultural lineage. For example, in the public art creation of Xianghu Station, Linping Station and Ding'an Road Station, the design team selected a total of 158 items, including humanities heritage, natural scenery, historical sites and other elements into the creation, which awakened the cultural memory of Hangzhou people.

The use of historical and cultural elements is an important consideration in Hangzhou Metro public art. Through the use of traditional color names such as cinnabar, peach red, dark green, precious purple, lotus root white, autumn yellow, lake blue, indigo, etc., each color represents a symbol, creating a subway station atmosphere with a sense of history and cultural heritage. Meanwhile, famous products such as celadon, lacquerware, seal cutting, calligraphy, paper cutting, folding fan, stone carving, bamboo weaving and other specialties were chosen as elements of the item design, reflecting the respect and inheritance of traditional culture and creating a subway station atmosphere with regional characteristics and cultural connotations. In addition, the cultural design with the themes of history, humanities, urban, nature, leisure, hope and innovation has shaped the humanistic image with various characteristics, creating a subway station atmosphere with a sense of the times and cultural atmosphere. In the application of the concept of degree, the primary and secondary relationship and order hierarchy are clarified, and the design system of each line and each station is established, which makes the subway station space have a sense of hierarchy and three-dimensional sense.

The public art design of Hangzhou Metro Line 1 is characterized by the in-depth excavation and display of the humanistic characteristics around each station. Among them, "Four Seasons in Sunflower Garden" is a public art work with narrative. (Figure 3) It not only shows the beauty and vitality of the sunflower garden in the spring and summer seasons, but also depicts the depressing scene in the fall and winter seasons. It expresses the reincarnation and complete

continuity of life, as well as the beauty and colorfulness of nature's four distinct seasons. It satisfies the Chinese people's sensual need for association. There are also "Four Seasons in the Sunflower Garden", "Lotus Sounding Beat", "Xixing Ancient Ferry", "Crossing the Lake to Ask for History", "Sheng talk traffic" and "lane life" and other stories are used in public art works, not only presents the history of Hangzhou, folklore and people's lives, but also for passengers to bring a philosophical cultural experience, further enriching the cultural heritage of the city.

Hangzhou Metro Line 1 in the beginning of the planning, the specific content of the toll and non-toll area walls, columns of public art creation, the design of the mural art as the main body, the significance is extraordinary, full of ideals of the college and the spirit of humanism, through the "war for the arts," the academic mission, the perfect embodiment of the "art from life, art service to life! It is full of the ideals and humanistic spirit of the college, and the academic mission of "fighting for art", which perfectly reflects the creative concept of "art comes from life, art serves life". This public art creation takes into account the form and function of public space, based on Hangzhou's regional culture and folklore characteristics of the art creation, this is a show of art in public space, the beauty of art to bring the public practice, when the construction of 15 platforms is completed, 15 perfect works of art in front of the eyes of the public, the feeling comes to the forefront, each piece of work by the authors have been given a more profound connotation. Each piece of artwork was given a deeper connotation by the author.

The subway and the city are interdependent ecological communities, the subway public art design is not only a mirror image of the city, but also an art as an incision to

connect people's emotions, so that the public can have a personal experience of dialoguing with the society, and regain a sense of identity in the shared urban memory.



Figure 3. Four Seasons in Sunflower Garden

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