

Aesthetic Education Space Design for Subway Stations Based on Regional Culture

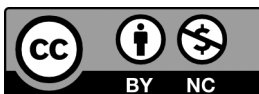
—A Case Study of Wuchang Station on Wuhan Metro Line 12

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Abstract: With the rapid development of urban rail transit in China, metro stations have transformed from mere transportation hubs into significant urban public spaces and cultural showcases. From the perspective of social aesthetic education, this paper explores how to organically integrate regional culture into metro station spaces through public art design, thereby constructing urban public spaces with aesthetic education functions. It begins by clarifying the intrinsic connections between public space and social aesthetic education, arguing that the high degree of publicity and everyday nature of metro spaces gives them a natural advantage for undertaking social aesthetic education roles. The paper subsequently summarizes design principles for creating aesthetic education spaces based on regional culture. Finally, taking selected stations on Wuhan Metro Line 12 as a case study, it conducts specific design practice research. This illustrates how to extract and translate regional cultural symbols to create metro aesthetic education spaces that enhance the public's aesthetic literacy and strengthen cultural identity, providing a reference for similar urban public space design.

Key words: Metro station space; Public art; Aesthetic education; Regional culture; Spatial design



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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

With the annual development of urban public transportation construction in Wuhan, the public spaces of urban rail transit stations have begun to be regarded as important venues for the daily life of urban residents. Beyond their function as urban transportation hubs, the diversification of urban culture and the increasing demand of the public for daily cultural life have led these public rail transit stations to gradually undertake certain cultural dissemination functions. Public art design, intervening in the urban metro station environment, has progressively become a significant component of current public space design in metro stations, contributing to their aesthetic enhancement.

As a vital showcase of urban culture, integrating regional culture into the public art design of metro stations endows these public spaces with their own cultural connotations, enabling them to assume certain aesthetic education functions. Using the intervention of public art in space as a method and taking the public art design of stations on Wuhan Metro Line 12 as a practical case study, this paper explores the interdependent relationship between aesthetic education, regional culture, and public art design in metro spaces. It aims to develop design strategies for aesthetic education spaces in metro stations based on regional culture. This research holds significant theoretical value and practical importance for enhancing the cultural soft power of the city, promoting the popularization of social aesthetic education, and optimizing the public space experience of citizens.

1.2 Research Object and Conceptual Definition

Aesthetic Education Space in Metro Stations: Refers to a specifically designed environment within the public space of a metro station that incorporates conscious design interventions, particularly through public art, to create an atmosphere with aesthetic education functions. It is not a traditional educational venue but rather influences the aesthetics of passengers subtly through spatial ambiance, artistic displays, cultural narratives, and other implicit means.

Intervention of Regional Culture: Refers to the proactive process in the design phase of exploring, refining, and extracting unique cultural elements—such as historical context, natural landscape, folk customs, and techniques—from the area where the station is located. These elements are then transformed into design language, allowing the space to carry and convey specific regional cultural connotations.

1.3 Research Status

In China's academic circle, research on the correlation between public art in subway spaces and social aesthetic education still has room for expansion. Existing achievements mostly focus on the transformation and application of regional cultural elements in the design of subway public art. Taking Yuan Yejun's *Research on Public Art Design in Subway Spaces from the Perspective of Regional Culture — An Empirical Analysis of Wuhan Subway Stations* as an example, this study systematically sorts out the interactive relationship between public art design theories, subway space characteristics, and the connotation of regional culture, and demonstrates the value dimension of integrating regional culture into the artistic design of subway spaces. Through a comparison of typical international cases, it is found that excellent subway station designs generally adopt diverse artistic forms to achieve the organic integration of urban context, historical memory, and spatial functions.

This research adopts a combined quantitative and qualitative method. By constructing a genealogy of cultural elements, Wuhan's regional culture is classified into eight types. Public cognitive data is obtained through questionnaires, and on-site surveys covering Wuhan's subway network are conducted. The research shows that Wuhan's characteristic stations mainly carry out cultural narration through four themes — natural landscapes, human customs, historical heritage, and urban development — by means of murals, reliefs, installation art, and other carriers. However, some stations have problems such as the stacking of historical symbols, redundant visual language, similar expressive techniques, and insufficient innovation. Based on theoretical construction and empirical analysis, the researchers propose a "four-dimensional design model for cultural translation," which includes a systematic design process of positioning-analysis-creation-presentation. At the practical level, it focuses on exploring modern translation strategies for cultural symbols such as Jingchu culture, hydrological systems, Panlong totems, bronze patterns, and the Mulan legend. It uses design methods such as form deconstruction, color reconstruction, and material innovation to realize the

contemporary artistic expression of traditional cultural elements. This study provides a practical path with both cultural depth and innovative dimensions for the public art design of subway spaces.

Regarding public participation in subway public art, Exploration of the "Silk of Nature" Themed Section Public Art Project of Shenzhen Rail Transit Line 12 from the Perspective of Public Participation mentions that the "publicity" of public art, under the appeal of its essential feature of "serving the people," introduces public participation into rail transit design, which will open up a new path in the field of rail transit public art creation. Taking the "Silk of Nature" Themed Section Public Art Project of Shenzhen Urban Rail Transit Line 12 as an example, the author deeply explores a new model of artists leading public participation in the creation of rail transit public art, actively promotes the sustainable development of urban construction, strengthens the emotional connection between citizens and the city, enhances communication, and stimulates the artistic creativity and innovation ability of the whole society.

In the discussion on the aesthetic education function of subway spaces, Viewing Public Space Design and Aesthetic Education Issues through Subway Spaces by Yi Jianfang and Zhang Lina draws a comparison between the public art designs of Jianguomen Station and South Gate of Forest Park Station of Beijing Subway, and thus points out that aesthetic education based on public spaces can be classified as a type of aesthetic perception education — beautiful public spaces can arouse viewers' aesthetic attitudes and stimulate their aesthetic thinking abilities. Excellent public spaces have public aesthetic education functions, which implicitly implement aesthetic education for the public. The article mentions that the maintenance of excellent and long-term aesthetic education spaces will have a long-term positive impact on the public's aesthetic ability and national quality. This emphasizes that public art and environmental design in public spaces, such as subways, have aesthetic education functions and roles, and these roles are gradually being valued.

In Xu Feiyang's Research on the Application of Public Art Design in Subway Spaces from the Perspective of Aesthetic Education, the coexisting relationship between aesthetic education and public art in subway spaces is pointed out. It is stated that the public art design in subway spaces enhances the cultural connotation of subway spaces and at the same time undertakes the function of social aesthetic education. Public art in subway spaces is also a carrier of aesthetic education for the public. Therefore, public art in subway spaces must follow the characteristics of aesthetic education, such as imagery, pleasure, emotionality, practicality, and universality, so as to meet the public's growing material and emotional needs. It provides referential design and creation principles for the aesthetic education-oriented design of public art in subway spaces.

Although the above articles indicate that subway stations, as an important extension of public spaces in cities, carry an important role in social aesthetic education, and provide certain theoretical and principled guidance for subsequent further research on public art creation and public space design related to social aesthetic education in subway station spaces, they do not address the feasible and specific methods and means for the design and practice of subway station public spaces in terms of social aesthetic education. Therefore, this paper aims to focus on the design of subway public spaces and public art based on the concept of aesthetic education spaces, and combine practical cases to provide a referential methodology and practical path for subsequent related design research.

2 The Relationship Between Metro Public Space and Social Aesthetic Education

2.1 Public Space as a Functional Carrier of Aesthetic Education

Urban public spaces are containers of civic social life and natural venues for cultural dissemination and aesthetic

experiences. Mr. Cai Yuanpei once advocated that "the way of aesthetic education, unless it reaches the point where cities and villages are entirely beautified, even if schools and families strive to promote it, the adverse influences of the environment will ultimately act as hindrances," emphasizing the importance of environmental aesthetic education. Compared to specialized institutions like art museums and museums, daily public spaces such as metro stations possess characteristics like openness, inclusivity, and high-frequency contact, enabling a more "daily-life integration" and "routinization" of aesthetic education. Their subtle, nurturing influence is often more profound and far-reaching.

2.2 Everydayness: The Key Link Connecting the Two

The concept of "everydayness" essentially originates from daily life, representing a further generalization and summary of everyday behaviors. Its core connotation emphasizes that in human social life, everydayness refers to the homogenized and fragmented nature common to daily activities.

In modern academic discourse, "everydayness" is generally interpreted in three primary ways. The first is a broad, general understanding, referring to the routine lives of ordinary people each day, encompassing the most common life behaviors such as eating, working, sleeping, and shopping. It is characterized by repetition and universality and typically excludes occasional lifestyles.

The second interpretation is philosophical. As Henri Lefebvre suggested, "Daily life has moved towards modernity, and everyday life, as an object within planning, is revealed through a system of equivalent exchange, marketization, and advertising". In other words, this level of understanding emphasizes the temporal dimension of everyday life, viewing it as a comprehensive system with time-variant characteristics.

The third interpretation involves the term as used in artistic creation, often referred to as the aesthetics of everyday life. It denotes the totality of popular culture and secular culture. This perspective often holds an affirmative attitude towards its themes and aesthetics while simultaneously adopting a critical stance, frequently employing creative techniques like "defamiliarization" or "transcending the everyday" for artistic expression.

As a typical public space, the metro station possesses strong characteristics of everydayness. Serving as a crucial hub for urban residents' daily commuting, the enormous passenger flow it carries makes it a bearer of urban culture, social interaction, and various social activities. In terms of openness and accessibility, metro stations are public spaces open to the public for significant periods, typically at least 16 hours a day. Their entrance and exit designs are usually connected to other social public spaces like city streets and squares, and they are often located near commercial complexes, universities, residential areas, and scenic spots, giving them wide coverage and strong interconnectivity.

This characteristic is evident not only in their openness to individual members of the public but also in their function of intersecting and accommodating other public spaces. Such features make metro stations an indispensable part of urban residents' daily lives. Due to their irreplaceable role in urban public transportation, metro stations exhibit high frequency in spatial use, with large numbers of passengers entering and exiting daily, forming fixed behavioral patterns.

Therefore, the public space of a metro station can be considered an everyday, multi-functional, and integrated special public space primarily serving urban transportation functions, intertwining and overlapping with other urban public spaces.

Consequently, the aesthetic education function and the public space of metro stations are connected based on everydayness, making this space a ubiquitous venue for aesthetic education within the city.

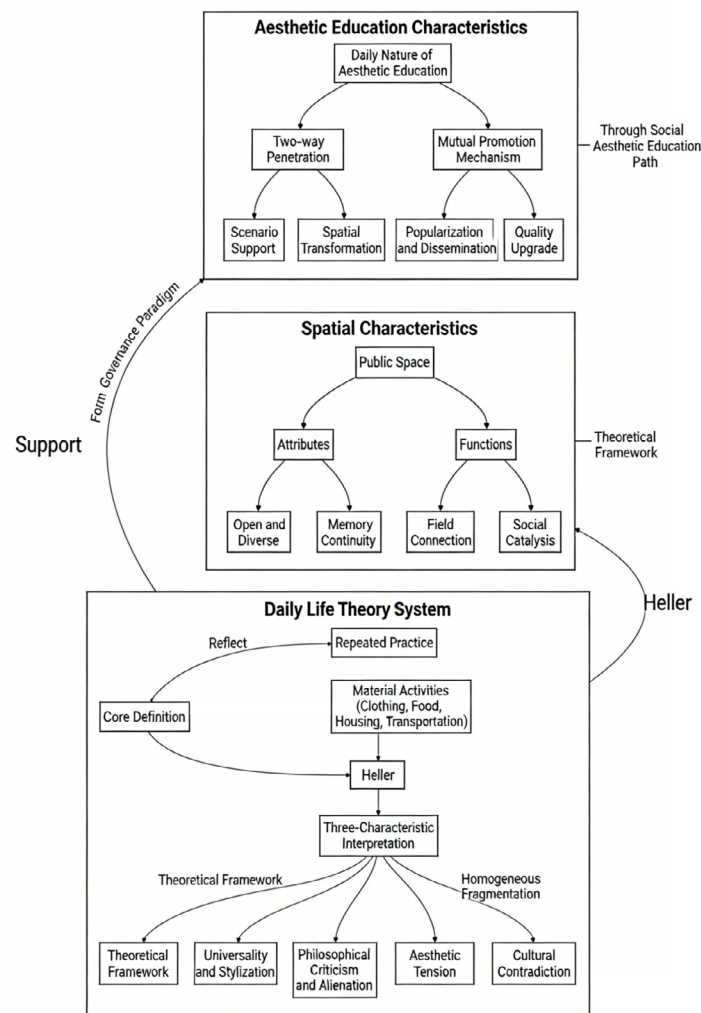


Figure 1 Everydayness: linking public space and aesthetic education

3 The Formation of Aesthetic Education Spaces in Subways Based on Regional Culture

3.1 The Role of Regional Culture

As the foundational field for cultural creation, regional space serves as both a prerequisite for cultural generation and a platform for cultural practice, as well as a core subject matter. Diverse natural endowments, spatial patterns, and differentiated human practices within a region collectively shape pluralistic regional cultural systems.

This type of cultural formation requires long-term sedimentation through historical processes to develop distinctiveness from mainstream culture, exhibiting characteristics of continuity, stability, and inheritability. Its evolution is constrained by the slow changes in natural and human factors, often undergoing a prolonged process. Urban regional culture is a core resource in urban development; it carries historical context and humanistic spirit, highlights the city's identity traits, and transmits collective value recognition.

A sound cultural ecology provides residents with a sense of spiritual belonging. Its specific value is manifested in four dimensions: Regarding cultural context inheritance, regional culture possesses a historical inheritance function due to its continuity. Rooted in the specific region's history and humanistic context, it forms unique connotations due to differences in geographical location and social background. Protecting indigenous culture is crucial for sustainable urban development, whereas blind replication or alteration will sever historical continuity. As Lewis Mumford stated, "The city is a container of culture," and public spaces like subways can also become important carriers of urban memory. Their public character promotes social interaction and accommodates a rich collective memory.

In terms of spiritual cultivation, regional culture reflects the lifestyles and practical experiences of specific groups and, in reverse, shapes their moral concepts, ways of thinking, and aesthetic orientations. The exemplary models and accumulated wisdom contained within cultural traditions become a source of behavioral reference and emotional identification for the public through a subtle edification mechanism.

Regarding identity construction, the explicit and implicit cultural contexts accumulated during urban development record the trajectory of civilization evolution through material carriers such as architecture and public spaces. As a vital gateway to the modern city, the spatial design of metro stations has become a key medium for disseminating the city's image and strengthening cultural awareness. People's understanding of a city often begins in such spaces and deepens throughout this process.

In terms of economic drivers, culture is regarded as a core resource in the knowledge economy and a catalyst for social development in the post-industrial era. It has transcended its original functions of heritage preservation and identity construction, evolving into a strategic tool for promoting spatial optimization, social progress, and economic upgrading, significantly enhancing urban competitiveness and brand image. In summary, through the integration of multidimensional values, regional culture not only plays a role in maintaining historical continuity but also promotes comprehensive and high-quality urban development in aspects such as spiritual guidance, identity shaping, and economic innovation.

3.2 The Intervention of Regional Culture in Metro Aesthetic Education Spaces

The intervention of regional culture in metro station spaces, and the exertion of its aesthetic education function, hinge on translating abstract cultural resources into perceptible and experienceable spatial language. This enables passengers to subconsciously receive aesthetic edification and cultural immersion during their daily passage.

Its methods of intervention, functions, and the formation mechanism of the aesthetic education function are specifically reflected in the following aspects.

The primary method for regional culture to intervene in metro spaces is the translation and embedding of cultural symbols. This involves deeply refining and creatively transforming the essence of regional culture (such as historical context, natural features, folk customs, and skills), evolving it into a design language suited to modern aesthetics and the specific characteristics of metro spaces. This approach breaks the homogeneity and indifference often found in underground environments. Through carriers like form, color, and displays, the space is granted unique cultural attributes and identifiability, transforming it from a mere transportation passageway into a cultural venue that carries urban memory and humanistic spirit.

Secondly, it involves the creation of an artistic atmosphere and the construction of an immersive experience. Moving beyond the visual dimension, it requires a holistic consideration of lighting, soundscape, and material texture

to shape an overall artistic environment that engages multiple senses. Leveraging the inherent everydayness and high-frequency contact characteristic of metro spaces, this subtle environmental influence affects passengers' aesthetic psychology and emotional state. This makes aesthetic education a "non-compulsory" experience, thereby enhancing the public's aesthetic perception and emotional resonance.

The aesthetic education function formed through the intervention of regional culture is a process triggered by the overall spatial experience, leading to internal psychological identification. When translated regional cultural symbols are systematically and artistically integrated into the everyday space of the metro, passengers, during their daily transit, unconsciously connect the cultural imagery and aesthetic character conveyed by the space with the city's identity and collective memory. Such continuous, life-oriented aesthetic experiences can not only foster the public's familiarity with and pride in regional culture but also, imperceptibly, shape their aesthetic taste and value orientation, ultimately realizing the popularization and integration of social aesthetic education into daily life.

4 Aesthetic Education Space Design for Wuhan Metro Line 12 Stations Based on Regional Culture

4.1 Overall Planning and Station Selection

As a national central city, Wuhan possesses profound Chu-Chu cultural heritage, unique river-city geographical characteristics, and a pioneering urban spirit. As a circular line traversing the three towns of Wuhan, Metro Line 12 serves as an ideal carrier for practicing the intervention of regional culture in aesthetic education spaces.

From its initial design phase, Line 12 established the overall cultural narrative thread of "River City Longitude and Latitude, a Civilization Corridor of Spatio-temporal Folding." Based on the locational characteristics and cultural resources of different stations, characteristic stations were selected for focused design. This paper takes the Wuchang Railway Station site, which has the most distinct historical development context, as a case study for design analysis.

4.2 Practical Ideas for Subway Public Art Design Based on Regional Culture

As mentioned earlier, aesthetic education and the daily nature of subway public spaces endow subway stations with social aesthetic education functions. As one of Wuhan's core transportation hubs, the site allows for the effective integration of regional culture into public art design strategies for the space, which can be implemented through artistic design colors, design element composition, and forms in specific practice.

In Chu culture, representative colors derived from Warring States lacquerware, such as black and red, have visual correspondence with the colors of early domestic steam locomotive heads. Colors like patina, due to their high color recognition, can be used as the color theme of artworks. Integrate these colors into concrete graphics with strong Wuhan regional cultural characteristics, such as "phoenix", "locomotive", and "Yangtze River Bridge". The audience can understand the representative regional culture of Wuhan through these straightforward, concrete graphics, and complete the information acquisition process from colors to representative cultures, and from visual perception to conscious association through the color characteristics of the artworks. Ultimately, the representative colors and symbols of regional culture together form a universal social aesthetic education function.

4.3 Case Study Design Analysis

The phoenix has been a core cultural totem of the Chu-Chu region since ancient times. Its spiritual connotation is rooted in the historical traditions and geographical environment of the Chu area, serving as both a concrete expression of ethnic beliefs and a witness to the pluralistic unity of Chinese civilization. Historically, the Chu people considered themselves descendants of the fire god Zhurong, and the phoenix, regarded as the "essence of fire," was seen as an incarnation of their ancestors. Its imagery can be traced back to primitive phoenix patterns at the Gaomiao cultural site in Hunan, dating back 7,800 years, evolving into a symbol of the Chu people by the Warring States period. Culturally, the phoenix embodies the Chu people's ethnic identity, characterized by "revering the phoenix and favoring red." Artistically, the phoenix image, manifested in Chu Ci, silk paintings, and modern dance dramas, exhibits romanticist qualities. Its spiritual core embodies freedom, transcendence, philosophical contemplation of life and death, and cultural integration—reflected in its symbolic attribute of "perching only on the Chinese parasol tree," representing noble and unsullied virtue.

The historical evolution of the Wuchang Railway Station began with the establishment of the Tongxiangmen Station in 1916. Initially a second-class small station on the Wuchang to Puqi section of the Yuehan Railway, it had only one track and a small ticket office, handling fewer than a hundred passengers daily. It was damaged by Japanese bombing during the 1938 Battle of Wuhan. After the Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge opened in 1957, the station was relocated to its current site and renamed Wuchang Station. A renovation project in 2006, themed on Chu culture, incorporated a "Chu Palace" architectural style with Bianzhong bell reliefs and red-and-black lacquerware aesthetics, making it the first modern transportation hub in China to integrate regional culture so prominently.



Figure 2 Historical evolution of the Wuchang railway station site

From a colonial railway tool to a national transportation artery, its century-long transformation witnesses both the technological evolution of China's railway system and the nation's modernization process, engraving a profound narrative of national self-strengthening and cultural confidence.

The design integrates the Chu cultural motif of "Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix" with the Wuchang Railway Station—a witness to Wuhan's century of changes. Through an interwoven narrative of past and present, illusion and reality, it depicts the phoenix's cyclical rebirth through nirvana along the banks of the Yangtze and Han Rivers. The artistic imagery awakens from divine trees nurtured between heaven and earth and river waters, carrying the nourishment of rain and dew across time, metaphorically reflecting the trials and sublimation of human urbanization. The century-old Wuchang Railway Station, which evolved from the small Tongxiangmen Station with just one platform to a "Chu Palace"-style hub embodying Chu cultural characteristics, and from steam locomotives to high-speed trains, concretely illustrates the trajectory of urban development. Traditional river-city architecture, the modern metropolis, and natural landscapes are harmoniously woven into the visual narrative, embodying a design philosophy that integrates mountain-water cityscapes with humanistic urbanism and merges traditional aesthetics with contemporary sensibilities.



Figure 3 Renderings of the "Integrated City-Station Wuchang" design for Wuchang railway

Leveraging the transfer hub characteristics of Wuchang Station, the design utilizes its large elevated transfer space to linearly arrange artworks at the mid-level section. As passengers transfer via escalators, their vertical movement allows them to view the pieces from the mid-level to the top, engaging with a linear visual narrative that depicts Chu culture totems and the historical development of Wuchang Railway. Decoratively, the undulating contours of the ceiling structure and the colored wall artworks break the monotony of the station's interior design, imbuing the transportation hub with cultural context and historical depth.

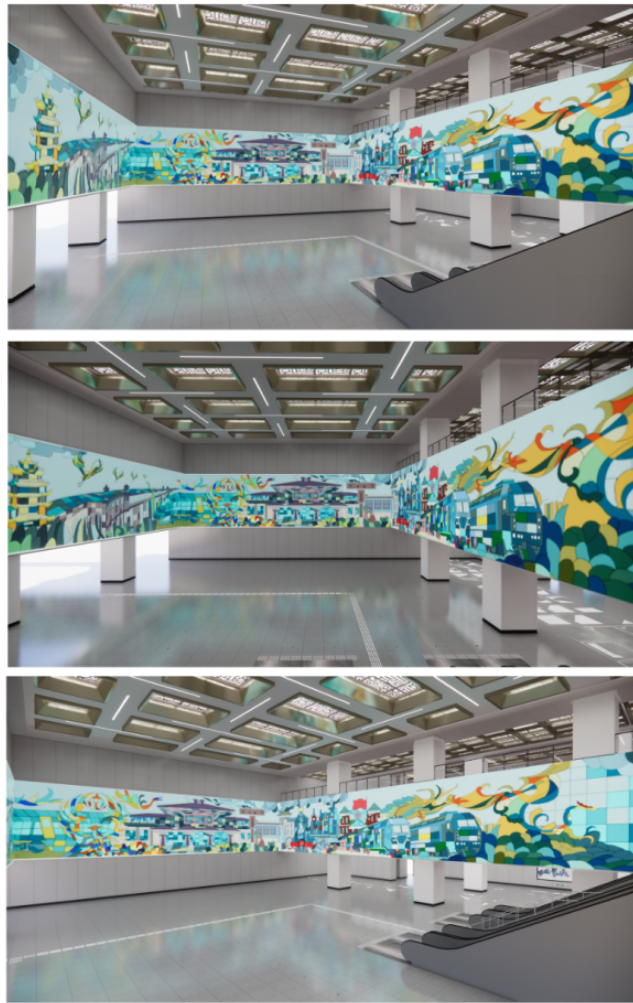


Figure 4 Wuchang railway station of metro line 12 design renderings

Wuchang Railway Station, as a pivotal hub reflecting Wuhan's urban history and railway development, integrates Chu cultural elements, the station's historical evolution, and its characteristic as a "transport hub connecting nine provinces" into its design. On the level of design presentation, differentiated cognitive paths are constructed for diverse audience groups: for visitors, cultural symbols within the station—through imagistic translation—form an initial impression of Hubei's cultural spirit, utilizing core motifs like phoenix patterns and bianzhong bell reliefs as cognitive anchors for understanding Chu culture; for local passengers, imagery depicting historical scenes reinforces deeper regional cultural identity, forming a cognitive loop of “spatial narrative → cultural decoding → identity confirmation.”

The “Wuchang, the City-Station” concept facilitates a panoramic, linear narrative where spatial visuals encourage comprehensive engagement: moving viewings connect scattered pictorial elements, complemented by an image-based guidance system for information access. This interactive aesthetic process not only deepens public participation but also enhances the effectiveness of cultural dissemination.

Chu culture, as a magnificent chapter within the Chinese civilization lineage, possesses a visual symbol system that inherently resonates with collective memory. Through the intervention of regional culture, the metro space facilitates both the experience of local cultural identity and the enhancement of aesthetic education.

5 Conclusion and Prospects

This study demonstrates the theoretical framework and practical pathway for the aesthetic education space design of metro stations based on regional culture.

Leveraging their inherent characteristics of publicness, everydayness, and high passenger flow, metro spaces provide an irreplaceable platform for the dissemination of social aesthetic education. The core value generated by the intervention of regional culture lies in constructing a culture-oriented aesthetic education environment. When regional culture is integrated into the metro space through spatial atmosphere creation and narrative design, daily commuting can be transformed into a process of aesthetic education.

Based on the high-frequency contact experience, the public subconsciously acquires cognition and emotional identification with regional culture. Thereby, while enhancing public aesthetic literacy, it strengthens the spiritual connection with the urban cultural community.

The innovativeness of this study lies in providing a specific operational path to implement the concept of aesthetic education in public space. Through creative spatial narratives that trigger people's perception of regional culture and identity confirmation within the space, it achieves differentiated aesthetic education goals and enriches the spatial experience of commuters.

In the future, research should focus more on new forms of interactive aesthetic education enabled by digital technology, as well as the innovative application of interdisciplinary collaboration mechanisms in large-scale public projects. It is crucial to explore how to balance cultural preservation and contemporary innovation amidst rapid urban development, and simultaneously establish a dynamic evaluation system for aesthetic education effectiveness. The ultimate goal is to make the metro, as an urban arterial space, truly become a significant public sphere for cultural heritage and aesthetic nourishment.

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