

New Space for City Communication: A Study on Culture Transmission by Nanjing Metro

XIA Fan^{[a],*}; LÜ Muyan^[b]

^[a]School of Journalism and Communication, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

^[b]School of Liberal Art, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

*Corresponding author.

Supported by National Innovation Training Program for College Students. project number (202010319017).

Received 22 December 2020; accepted 21 February 2021

Published online 26 March 2021

Abstract

The media on which the communication of city image depends are becoming more and more diversified. Subway, a kind of public transportation which is cheap and convenient, is not only a popular way of travel, but also an important carrier to spread city culture. No matter at home or abroad, in big or small cities, the cultural atmosphere of subway is getting stronger. The subway is not only a space for traffic and interpersonal communication, but also a space for cultural transmission. As one of the cities with the most cultural heritage in China, Nanjing pays special attention to cultural transmission in the design of subway in all aspects. This article analyzes the present situation and problems of cultural communication by Nanjing metro, and puts forward some pertinent measures for its sustainable development.

Key words: City image; culture transmission; Nanjing Metro

Xia, F., & Lü, M. Y. (2021). New Space for City Communication: A Study on Culture Transmission by Nanjing Metro. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 17(1), 30-34. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/12084>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12084>

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are a great variety of means of transportation that connect people, cities and countries.

People not only have various choices, but also have a convenient and fast way to travel. For long-distance travel, there are high-speed trains, planes and ships, while for short-distance travel, there are shared bikes, private cars and buses. The words *communication* and *transportation* are never really separate. They support each other from beginning to end. Traffic in modern society is not only confined to the simple definition of *transportation*, but is bearing the culture and the image of a city. Subway is one of the most rapidly developed and accepted modes of transportation by the citizens in recent years. As a kind of rail transit, the subway realizes the fast passenger transport within the city. On the basis of stability and convenience, the government has kept low ticket prices to meet the daily travel needs of most citizens. Large flow of people, empty space and long running hours are the obvious advantages of subway in favor of cultural communication. Whether it is the handrails, mobile TV and voice broadcast in the train, or the passageways, walls and floors in the station hall, they can all become the media to publicize urban culture and show the image of a city. Using these media to carry out cultural propaganda can promote the positive display of the city image. Words, pictures, radio and television and new media all play an irreplaceable role in the cultural communication of the subway.

2. OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BY RAIL TRANSIT

2.1 Brief Introduction of Culture Transmission by Subway Worldwide

Around the world, there are countless countries and regions that attach great importance to subway culture. Many subway stations have paid attention to the advantages of cultural communication of this space at the very beginning of their establishment, and created

subway stations with unique artistic atmosphere and urban temperament through graffiti, sculpture, lighting and other decorations.

The Stockholm subway station has been called *the Longest Art Museum in the World*. Since it opened in 1950, artists have been creating art inside the station till now. Most of Stockholm's subway stations are cut into original caves, so artists add oil paintings, sculptures and ceramic tiles to those rocks to create works with the theme of red, yellow and blue lines, which not only ensure a high aesthetic interest, but also imply rich connotation. Such as the silhouette of subway workers, the destruction of the natural environment under industrialization, the welcome of new immigrants to Sweden, etc.

The Moscow metro station uses marble and ore to lay the lobby, with sculptures, chandeliers, Mosaic collages and other decorations to create a luxurious style. Each station of Moscow subway is decorated with different historical celebrities, historic sites and events as the theme. For example, some subway stations are named after *Pushkin*, *Turgenev*, *Chekhov* and other literary great names, which create a good cultural educational atmosphere.

China's subway cultural construction is also very successful. Beijing, a historical and ancient city, designs its subway with unique Beijing characteristics, including the Great Wall, Beijing Opera and so on. For instance, *Nanluoguxiang* station has a courtyard (called *Siheyuan* in Chinese) as the appearance of the station. While protecting historical works, it also publicizes the traditional culture of Beijing, which makes local people feel warm and foreign tourists feel fresh and interested.

Hong Kong subway highlights the city characteristics in its interior decoration. Each site uses a background color, through the Mosaic brick or a large painting layout, not only to achieve the purpose of beauty, but also show the image of each site characteristics. For example, *Rainbow* station uses colorful Mosaic bricks for laying out, which is full of artistic atmosphere.

The design of a subway station, to some degree, can show the extent to which the city is concerned about its culture and city image. Whether a city can present its characteristics and connotation to the public through subway can also reveal its inner culture and deposits.

2.2 Media of Culture Communication by Subway

Subway can apply different kinds of media for culture communication, of which the most common are words and pictures. In addition to the murals and sculptures mentioned above, there are also various advertisements on the walls on both sides of the passage. Taking Wuxi Metro as an example, Line 2 has built moral and civilization themed walls to carry forward the Core Socialist Values. By using Wuxi clay portraits, the lovely characters and concise stories give passengers a good impression and a subtle influence of spiritual civilization.

The second medium is the in-station voice broadcast. Although it is sometimes overlooked, it is of great help to passengers. It can also reflect the inclusiveness and affinity of a city. Subway broadcasts in major Chinese cities are usually in Mandarin and English, while in some cities, additional languages have been added to accommodate the city trait. In Guangzhou Metro, considering the large number of Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou, Cantonese auxiliary broadcasting is added in addition to Mandarin and English to help local residents who mainly speak Cantonese to understand some information. Japanese, Korean and Russian were added to the broadcast on Dalian subway in 2017, reflecting the international perspective and inclusiveness of this city. Looking abroad, as one of the three major stations of Seoul subway system, *Seoul* station in South Korea broadcasts in four languages, Korean, English, Chinese and Japanese. The broadcasting in Korean and English are more complete and detailed, while that in Chinese and Japanese is simpler, reflecting the humanistic care of South Korea.

The third medium is mass media which has developed rapidly in recent years. Most subway stations are equipped with hanging televisions, which display the time, the countdown to the arrival of next train, the weather, etc., as well as regular news or advertisements. Similarly, there are mobile televisions on the compartment walls inside the train, which broadcast news and public service advertisements, most of which are closely related to people's daily live and promote the culture and image of the city, to some extent.

3. PRESENT SITUATION OF CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BY NANJING METRO

3.1 Basic Idea

When it comes to subway culture, we should not ignore the basic idea of subway construction. Doing a good job of overall planning at the beginning of the design is the basis of all work. Some scholars divide the subway culture into four sections as follow: (1) the superficial or material culture, such as the appearance of subway stations and transportation facilities; (2) the shallow and behavioral culture, such as various subway culture propaganda, social practice, behavior habits, etc.; (3) the system culture of the middle level, such as the subway organization form and relevant laws, norms and standards; (4) the deep and spiritual culture, such as passengers' ideology, aesthetic taste, values, ideals and beliefs, etc. These four aspects comprehensively summarize the ways and methods of the integration of subway and culture.

Nanjing metro, which can be traced back to the *Jingshi Railway* in 1907, was officially put into operation in 2005. *Jingshi Railway* was the only small railway in each big city of China at that time, and it was the earliest urban rail

transit in China, and also the beginning of modern public transportation in Nanjing. After a series of expansions and changes, *Jingshi Railway* was dismantled and the Nanjing metro was proposed in 1984, with formal construction beginning two years later. Like the history of the city, the history of Nanjing metro has gone through a period of prosperity but not a period of depression. In the first year of its operation, Nanjing metro achieved a balance of income and expenditure and a slight surplus, which broke the worldwide problem of metro operation loss. On the basis of ensuring the service standard and the appropriate price, the success of Nanjing metro is closely related to the population flow and geographical conditions of Nanjing.

Since its inception, Nanjing metro has integrated the concept of cultural display and city image building into every aspect of its design.

First of all, the logo of Nanjing Metro is rather distinctive. Different from the square and round design of subway signs of other cities, the logo of Nanjing Metro takes a large area of red as the base, and the outer edge presents a plum blossom shape as a whole. Plum blossom is not only the city flower of Nanjing, but also the representative of the city spirit. It blooms proudly in the harsh environment, which is also a symbol of Nanjing's tenacious survival in the difficult years and revitalization of prosperity. The red background colour represents prosperity and enthusiasm, expressing the welcome to passengers. The white space in the middle of the logo is designed as a deformed letter *M* in the shape of a train locomotive, implying *METRO* while illustrating the element of subway. In addition, *M* is similar to the Chinese character *Shi* (meaning *city* in English), commemorating the pride of Nanjing in the 20th century, *Jingshi Railway*. Connecting history and the world, the logo of Nanjing Metro shows the profound heritage and broad vision of this city.

Secondly, the corporate culture of Nanjing Metro also integrates its concept into the construction of the subway. The construction of Nanjing metro not only pays attention to practicality and instrumentality, but also emphasizes the humanistic care of subway. Such construction concept makes the subway not only serve for travel, but also strive to serve the spiritual needs of citizens, enhance the cultural atmosphere of the city, and show the inner self-restraint of the ancient city. The corporate vision of Nanjing Metro is *Take the Responsibility of Road, Follow the Principle of Humanity, Lead the Traffic First, Develop the Power of Ancient City*, which well reflects the humanistic concept of Nanjing Metro. And its brand concept of *Driving with humanity, Reaching physically and mentally* shows its idea of integrating speed and emotion.

3.2 Culture Wall

At the very beginning, Nanjing Metro established the new concept of *Cultural Station*, which was the first city

to build cultural stations in China. Nanjing metro takes Chinese traditional culture and Nanjing ancient culture as the theme of the stations to design the walls. At present, the theme cultural walls are presented in Line 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 and S8, whose themes include traditional festivals, *A Dream in Red Mansions*, Nanjing celebrities, colorful *Jinling* (ancient name of Nanjing). Below the main theme of each route, each station has its own sub-theme. Take Line 3 (*A Dream in Red Mansions*) as an example. The theme of *Daxinggong Station* is *12 Hairpins of Jinling*. Through the combination of relief and Mosaic on the wall, the Mosaic collage of twelve beautiful portraits is inlaid into the relief. The overall style is classical and elegant, based on the ancient fine brushwork. Moreover, the theme of *Confucius Temple Station* is *New Year's Eve Banquet*. *Jiamu* is in the center of the picture, and other characters are standing around. The whole scene revives the plot of the banquet and the celebration of the Lantern Festival in the novel, which is really lively and interesting. The clever thinking of wall body depends on using the lamplight on top, making the whole wall bright and brilliant. The theme of *Yuhuamen Station* is *Daiyu Burying Flowers*, with *Baoyu*, *Daiyu* and *Baochai* as the main roles of the story, showing each inner emotion and mood, exquisite and vivid. The younger generation is more familiar with cartoon style, therefore using carved art glass display, gorgeous and bright colors. In addition to these, there are also *Great Virtual Fantasy*, *Yuan Imperial Concubine Visiting Relatives* and other themes, closely linked to the plot of the book *A Dream of Red Mansions*, with bold selection of materials, exquisite painting style and strong appreciation.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the station names of Nanjing metro are all written by local calligraphers, which is the first way in China and another embodiment of the humanistic spirit in the design of Nanjing metro. Unlike the stereotypical typography, station names written by calligraphers have a strong sense of temperature and culture. Calligraphers such as *Guan Jun*, *Yu Tianchi* and *Sun Xiaoyun* have inscriptions for different lines, which not only show the classical temperament of Nanjing, but also play a good role in promoting the inheritance of Chinese classical culture. In conjunction with the writing of the name of the station, Nanjing Metro also invited calligraphers to write Spring Festival couplets and send happy wishes to passengers at designated stations during the Festival. This activity has been held for several years and has become one of the corporate cultures of Nanjing Metro, allowing more citizens to appreciate the charm of calligraphy and carry forward the traditional Chinese culture.

3.3 Mass Media

The introduction and widespread use of new media has made it possible to recreate a wider landscape. The application of mass media plays a vital role in the cultural

propaganda and urban image communication of the subway.

On the one hand, the media equipped on the platform and in the train can promote cultural transmission. Part of the TV set in the platform of Nanjing Metro is suspended on the top of the wall, perpendicular to the direction of the train. Part of the TV are set above the train screen door. No matter where the TV is placed, the content of the broadcast includes civil affairs and people's livelihood, important notices, current news and tourism, public welfare, commercial advertisements. The former deals with hot issues at home and abroad, which are closely related to people's lives, while the latter provides passengers with a channel to know different information.

On the other hand, Nanjing Metro has opened official accounts on various new media platforms. These accounts, operated by Nanjing Metro Company, regularly publish information about Nanjing Metro, not only providing traffic information to the general public, but also showing Nanjing Metro to the outside world. To some extent, these official accounts also convey the image of Nanjing as a city. At the top of the official Weibo account of *Nanjing Metro* is *The Latest Edition of Nanjing Metro Ride Book*, which was released on December 21, 2020. It includes the running time and stops of each line, as well as some rules of civilized behavior to be observed when taking the subway. This ride book will be updated every year, reflecting the humanistic care of this account for the public. In addition, *Nanjing Metro* releases yesterday's passenger flow volume, temperature reminder, and daily life tips which are very helpful for passengers in need. At the same time, *Nanjing Metro* also interacts with other accounts, actively replying and forwarding works from other accounts, and the replies are cordial and official. The account has 1.22 million followers, which should not be underestimated, and its promotion about Nanjing metro and the city is also beyond satisfactory.

4. DEVELOPMENT PATH OF CULTURE COMMUNICATION BY NANJING METRO

4.1 Promote All-media Communication

Since the term *all-media* was put forward in the 1990s, scholars at home and abroad have carried out in-depth understanding and exploration of this concept. Since the 21st century, the domestic scholars for the understanding of *all-media* have become more comprehensive. Some scholars believe that *all-media* is an integrated use and a new form of communication through text, picture, audio, video, network and other means to transmit information, which is the result of the deep fusion of various media. The era of all-media is approaching, and the limitation of physical space on information dissemination is no longer too big to be surmountable. In such an era, the subway, as a relatively closed space with large flow of people, long

operation time and diverse media type, is undoubtedly an important place to improve the city cultural influence and strengthen regional characteristics. In this context, the cultural display of subway stations is bound to improve the quality, increase the quantity, expand the capacity, use emerging technology, carry out conceptual innovation, and create an urban subway space with rich connotation but not ostentatious, connecting with the world but not abandoning the tradition, keeping up with the fashion trend but also considering the needs of middle-aged and elderly people.

At present, Nanjing Metro has formed a set of system in this respect, which integrates tradition and modernity very well. However, in the future, Nanjing Metro can still break through the limitations, continue to innovate, and deepen the exploration of history and culture and the application of emerging technologies. In 2019, KFC and the National Museum of China launched an interactive subway museum event titled *National Treasures Glory of China* at Shanghai Metro *Xujiahui* Station. The *Xujiahui* station hall was transformed into a miniature national museum, and new technologies including visual art and interactive technology, made passengers feel like they were in the scene of an ancient Lantern Festival. Such activities not only meet the needs of citizens for sightseeing, but also increase the flow of people in the subway station, and achieve the business goal of the brand. Using modern technology to restore ancient scenes is one of the projects that Nanjing Metro can try in this historic city. What's more, all-media attempts are not limited to these, and they can also be improved and tried in voice broadcasting, interior decoration and other aspects.

4.2 Choose the Correct and Proper Culture

The kind of culture that the subway should spread is different for each city, in that each city has its own unique temperament, such as the depth of Beijing, the fashion of Shanghai, the elegance of Nanjing. The kind of culture with which people want to get in touch requires the subway company to consider and make statistical analysis. Even if we subdivide each line and each station into the main group of passengers, we can focus on the differences and put them into practice. The stations with scenic spots around, such as *Ming Palace Station*, *Jiming Temple Station*, can be designed based on the characteristics of surrounding scenic spots. The stations with colleges and universities around, such as *Xuezelu Station* and *Nanjing University Xianlin Campus Station*, can be added up with the history introduction of the school. In short, the metro is supposed to select popular and positive culture to spread, thus reflecting the high spirit and strong historical heritage of the city.

In recent years, major cities in China also pay attention to the transmission of culture in the practice of rail transit construction, and begin to carry out related design work.

By learning from the excellent foreign rail transit culture display and considering the local temperament in China, more and more cities show their unique urban style in the actual planning. This is also an important direction for the development of subway culture in China in the future.

4.3 Strengthen the Integration of Literary and Artistic Works with Metro

Nowadays, metro-themed literature and art works, especially photography and film and television works, have been increasingly presented in front of the public, and have been widely accepted and placed into the evaluation system. The speeding trains, crowded crowds and modern stations are all represented in various works, presenting the image of the subway and the city to the whole society. This kind of practice confirms the viewpoint of this paper, that subway can build the image of a city and spread the culture of a city. Horizontally speaking, the emotional communication between people in the work records the ordinary life in the city, praising the warm bits and criticizing the cold moments. Longitudinally, the developing transportation technology in the work records the change of time and leaves a memory of social development. A typical example of this kind of work is *Subway to Spring*, and we believe there will be more excellent works in the future. In a sense, literary and artistic works about subway as well as the whole subway system, will shoulder the responsibility of cultural communication, cultural innovation and cultural development.

CONCLUSION

Rail transit plays an important role in cultural communication and image building of a city. Whether traditional media or new media, as long as the right way and content of presentation is chosen, it can help the urban image communication, and even lead the construction and development of a city. Taking Nanjing City of Jiangsu Province as an example, this paper explores the current situation, problems and future of urban subway cultural communication. From the concept, practice and subsequent improvement, the cultural construction of Nanjing Metro has its own advantages and disadvantages, but the space for improvement is still quite immeasurable.

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