

**SAFEGUARDING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN
UZBEKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE
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Abstract: Uzbekistan, with its rich history and cultural diversity, is home to numerous forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), including traditional music, dance, oral traditions, crafts, and rituals. The rise of digital technologies has both presented challenges and opened up new opportunities for the preservation, promotion, and transmission of these traditions. This article explores the issues surrounding the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Uzbekistan in the context of the digital world. It examines the challenges, such as the risk of cultural appropriation, loss of authenticity, and digital divide, as well as the opportunities that digital platforms offer, such as wider global visibility, online education, and digital archiving. Through case studies of successful ICH projects in Uzbekistan, such as the digitization of traditional music and embroidery, this article provides insights into effective strategies for protecting and promoting cultural heritage in the digital age.

Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage, especially in the Bukhara region, is home to numerous forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), including traditional music, dance, and crafts. Among these, Shashmakom (a classical form of Uzbek music) and Bukhara's renowned embroidery hold significant cultural value. The development and safeguarding of these traditions have been enhanced in the digital age, though challenges persist. This article examines the preservation, challenges, and opportunities in safeguarding Shashmakom and embroidery in Bukhara. It explores how digital platforms, alongside traditional methods, can both support and complicate the safeguarding of these practices. Through case studies of Shashmakom and Bukhara embroidery, this article analyzes the efforts made in preserving these arts, the problems faced, and how these cultural practices have evolved over the years.

Key Words: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Digital preservation, Cultural transmission, Traditional crafts, Digital divide, Cultural appropriation, Online education.

Introduction: The Republic of Uzbekistan is home to a rich tapestry of intangible cultural heritage, ranging from ancient crafts like suzani, embroidery to oral traditions and music. In recent decades, the digital era has brought both challenges and opportunities for the preservation of these traditions. With rapid technological advancements, the potential for digital archiving, virtual museums, and online platforms for cultural exchange is greater than ever before. However, there are significant concerns

about the authenticity of cultural practices, the commercialization of heritage, and the unequal access to digital tools that may hinder the safeguarding of cultural diversity.

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of intangible cultural heritage in Uzbekistan, focusing on the role of digital technologies in preserving these practices. It explores the benefits and risks associated with digital interventions, offering case studies and discussing potential solutions for overcoming challenges.

Analysis and Discussion:

The Bukhara region of Uzbekistan is home to a wealth of intangible cultural heritage, including two key practices: Shashmakom and Bukhara embroidery. Shashmakom, a classical music genre, and the traditional embroidery of Bukhara are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Uzbekistan. These traditions have faced challenges in an era of globalization and technological change, but they have also benefited from the opportunities digital technologies offer. This article will explore how these two art forms have been developed, the issues they face, and how they have been preserved over the years. Case studies from the Bukhara region will be used to illustrate the impact of modern strategies on their preservation.

Shashmakom: A Classical Uzbek Music Tradition

Shashmakom is a classical form of Uzbek music that blends Persian, Turkic, and Central Asian influences. It consists of six distinct cycles and is traditionally performed with instruments like the dutar, tanbur, and ghijak. Shashmakom is performed in a communal setting and often passed down through generations in intimate settings, such as family gatherings or local festivals.

Development and Challenges:

Traditional Transmission: Shashmakom was traditionally passed down orally from teacher to student, with each performance style being unique to the region or teacher. This method ensured that the music remained deeply connected to the community and its practices.

Challenges: The rise of digital media and modernization has led to a decline in live performances, with younger generations becoming more attracted to globalized forms of music. Furthermore, digitalization has posed a challenge in maintaining the authenticity of Shashmakom performances, as recordings often fail to capture the essence of live, communal performances.

Case Study 1: Digital Archiving of Shashmakom: The Uzbekistan State Conservatory has digitized a significant number of Shashmakom performances, providing access to global audiences. However, while this has expanded the audience for Shashmakom, it has also led to concerns about the loss of regional variations and the emotional depth of live performances.

Opportunities: The development of online platforms, such as YouTube, has allowed Shashmakom performances to reach a broader audience and attract a younger generation of listeners. Digital platforms have also enabled scholars and musicians to access rare performances that were previously inaccessible.

Bukhara embroidery, with its intricate patterns and use of vibrant colors, is a distinctive art form that dates back centuries. It is often used to create garments, household items, and ceremonial objects. The embroidery techniques in Bukhara are unique to the region, and the art is known for its fine needlework and the symbolic meaning behind its patterns.

Development and Challenges:

Traditional Transmission: Historically, Bukhara embroidery was passed down through generations, often taught within families. The design motifs were closely tied to the region's cultural identity, with influences from Persian, Turkish, and Central Asian textile traditions.

Challenges: The traditional practice of embroidery in Bukhara faces several challenges, including the commercialization of the craft, the loss of traditional designs, and the decreasing number of skilled

artisans. Furthermore, as younger generations move away from traditional crafts in favor of modern, mass-produced alternatives, there is concern that this art form may not be sustained in the future.

Case Study 2: Revitalization of Bukhara Embroidery: In recent years, efforts have been made to revive Bukhara embroidery through collaborations with international designers and artists. For example, projects like “Traditional Crafts of Uzbekistan” have worked to train young artisans in traditional techniques, offering them opportunities to showcase their work in international markets. Additionally, the introduction of digital design tools has helped artisans experiment with new styles while maintaining traditional techniques.

Opportunities: Digital platforms, such as social media and online marketplaces, have provided a venue for Bukhara artisans to sell their products and reach global audiences. Digital tutorials and online workshops have also played a role in preserving the craft by teaching younger generations how to replicate traditional designs.

Case Studies 3 (Development and Safeguarding in Bukhara Region):

Shashmakom Digital Archiving: The Uzbekistan State Conservatory has undertaken efforts to preserve Shashmakom through digital archives, providing online resources for music students and researchers. The digitalization of this tradition has helped preserve performances, though it has not entirely replaced the cultural value of live, communal experiences. The challenge remains in ensuring that these performances stay relevant and that the nuances of regional styles are not lost in the process.

Bukhara Embroidery Revitalization Projects: Local NGOs and government projects have focused on preserving Bukhara embroidery by promoting the craft as part of the national heritage. One successful initiative is the establishment of training programs for young women to learn traditional embroidery techniques. These programs combine traditional knowledge with modern business practices, helping artisans to market their products both locally and internationally.

The preservation of intangible cultural heritage in Uzbekistan, specifically in the Bukhara region, presents both significant challenges and opportunities. While digital technologies have provided valuable tools for the documentation and promotion of Shashmakom and Bukhara embroidery, they also raise concerns about authenticity, cultural appropriation, and the potential loss of traditional practices. Through concerted efforts by local communities, cultural institutions, and the government, these art forms can be preserved for future generations. The balance between traditional methods and digital innovation will be key in ensuring the continued vitality of Uzbekistan’s cultural heritage.

Challenges:

- 1. Risk of Cultural Appropriation and Loss of Authenticity:** As intangible cultural heritage becomes accessible to global audiences via digital platforms, there is a concern about cultural appropriation. The commercialization and misrepresentation of cultural practices can dilute their significance and authenticity. For example, the traditional suzani embroidery of Uzbekistan, when reproduced without understanding its cultural context, may lose its original meaning and artistry.
- 2. Digital Divide:** Despite the promise of digital preservation, there exists a significant digital divide, particularly in rural areas of Uzbekistan. Many artisans and cultural practitioners lack access to the necessary technology or skills to engage with digital

Opportunities:

- 1. Global Visibility and Access:** Digital tools can provide worldwide exposure to Uzbekistan’s unique intangible cultural heritage. Through online museums, digital archives, and social media platforms, Uzbek traditions, such as traditional puppet making and oral storytelling, can be shared with a global audience. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram allow artisans to showcase their skills and heritage to diverse international audiences, helping to ensure that cultural practices remain relevant and appreciated.
- 2. Online Education and Capacity Building:** Digital tools present opportunities for the transmission of traditional knowledge through online courses, virtual workshops, and e-learning platforms. This enables younger generations to learn about their

tools. This creates a gap in the representation of certain cultural practices online, often privileging urban, technologically savvy participants over rural artisans.

3. Over-reliance on Digital Platforms: While digital platforms offer global reach, an over-reliance on these platforms could lead to a decline in traditional methods of transmission, such as face-to-face teaching and communal engagement. The process of digitalizing cultural heritage might also overshadow the value of direct, lived experiences of cultural practices.

cultural heritage in new and engaging ways. For example, online courses on Uzbek traditional music and dance could foster greater appreciation and participation in these practices, both within Uzbekistan and globally.

3. Digital Archiving and Preservation: Uzbekistan has already begun digitizing key elements of its intangible cultural heritage, including music, art, and crafts. The creation of digital archives preserves cultural knowledge for future generations. Projects such as the "Digitization of Uzbek Music" have allowed traditional sounds to be archived and shared internationally, ensuring that these practices are protected and accessible for research and education.

Case Studies 4:

Digitization of Suzani Embroidery: The "Suzani Project", an initiative by the Uzbekistan National Commission for UNESCO, has focused on documenting and digitalizing the techniques and designs of traditional suzani embroidery. Through high-quality digital archives and online exhibitions, these intricate designs have been preserved and are now accessible to both scholars and the general public worldwide.

Uzbek Traditional Music Digitalization: The "Uzbekistan Traditional Music" project has worked on recording and digitally preserving traditional Uzbek music. In collaboration with musicians, ethnomusicologists, and digital archivists, the project aims to safeguard and promote Uzbekistan's rich musical heritage by creating an online archive accessible to students, researchers, and music enthusiasts worldwide.

Conclusion: The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Uzbekistan in the digital age presents both opportunities and challenges. While digital technologies offer new ways to promote and preserve cultural practices, they also raise concerns about the authenticity and accessibility of these traditions. By leveraging the power of digital tools while maintaining respect for cultural integrity, Uzbekistan can ensure the continued vitality of its rich cultural heritage. However, addressing the digital divide and fostering inclusive, culturally sensitive digital strategies will be crucial for the sustainable safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

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