

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION IN UZBEKISTAN AND SRI LANKA

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**Abstract:** *The topic discussed in the article is highlighted on the basis of efforts made in recent years to protect and popularize the existing intangible cultural heritage in our country and activities carried out in cooperation with UNESCO, decisions and regulations in this area, as well as social networking materials.*

**Key words:** *Uzbekistan, intangible, cultural, heritage, representative, security, gatekeeper, askia, lapar, pilaf, “Shashmakom”, “Lazgi”.*

In recent years, large-scale reforms implemented in the social and economic spheres of Uzbekistan, together with the country's new and open foreign policy, have contributed significantly to strengthening its positive image and reputation within the international community. According to available data, there are more than one hundred international rankings and indices that determine the standing of countries worldwide. Unfortunately, for many years Uzbekistan either had no position at all in certain rankings or occupied lower places. One of the main reasons for this situation was the absence of a unified institutional system and specialized bodies responsible for conducting systematic activities in this sphere.

As Uzbekistan continues to integrate rapidly into the global community, one of the most pressing tasks is to improve the effectiveness of utilizing the country's unique image and identity. This includes its rich cultural, historical, spiritual, and intellectual heritage; centuries-old traditions of statehood; internationally recognized contributions of the region to world civilization; traditions of interethnic and interfaith tolerance; social harmony; abundant natural resources; developed transport and communication infrastructure; and readiness for equal cooperation regardless of ideological differences.

In this regard, the protection and promotion of Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage occupy a particularly important place. It is well known that the Uzbek people possess not only a rich material heritage but also a diverse and valuable intangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage refers to the oral traditions, performing arts, customs, rituals,

festive events, knowledge concerning nature and the universe, as well as traditional craftsmanship skills and competencies that have been developed and transmitted over centuries.

Since Uzbekistan joined UNESCO in 1993, a number of cultural elements have been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. These include the Boysun Cultural Space, Shashmaqom, Katta Ashula, the Navruz Festival, Bakhshi Art, Askiya, the Culture and Traditions of Palov, Adras Weaving, Embroidery, the Lazgi Dance, the Art of Miniature Painting, and many other examples of Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage.

According to the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Measures to Further Enhance the Role and Influence of Culture and Art in Society," activities related to the preservation and utilization of intangible cultural heritage elements, including rope-walking (*dorbozlik*), Askiya, and Lapar, were included among the categories of activities for which self-employed citizens may obtain temporary labor certificates.

The experiences of Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage demonstrate both common objectives and distinct institutional approaches. Both countries implement the principles of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and consider cultural heritage preservation an important component of national cultural policy. However, their mechanisms of protection, promotion, and transmission differ significantly.

In Uzbekistan, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage has become one of the priority directions of state policy in recent years. Comprehensive legal reforms, presidential decrees, state programs, and institutional mechanisms have been introduced to preserve and promote traditional cultural values. Particular attention has been devoted to safeguarding cultural elements such as Shashmaqom, Bakhshi art, Askiya, Palov culture, Lazgi dance, and traditional handicrafts. The establishment of the Research Institute of Cultural Studies and Intangible Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture further strengthened scientific research and documentation activities in this field.

In contrast, Sri Lanka's approach relies heavily on community participation, religious institutions, and traditional cultural networks. The preservation of intangible cultural heritage is closely connected with Buddhist religious traditions, local rituals, folk performances, and indigenous knowledge systems. Traditional cultural expressions such as Kandyan dance, Kolam folk theatre, Nadagam performances, traditional medicine, and ritual ceremonies continue to be transmitted through community-based practices and master-apprentice relationships.

A significant feature of Sri Lanka's cultural policy is the integration of intangible cultural heritage into cultural tourism. One of the most internationally recognized examples is the Esala Perahera Festival in Kandy, which attracts thousands of visitors annually and serves as an important symbol of Sri Lankan cultural identity. Uzbekistan has also actively promoted its cultural heritage through international festivals such as the International

Maqom Art Festival, the International Festival of Bakhshi Art, the International Handicrafts Festival, and various cultural forums organized under UNESCO patronage.

From a comparative perspective, Uzbekistan follows a predominantly state-centered model of cultural heritage management, while Sri Lanka demonstrates a more community-based model in which local cultural actors and religious institutions play a leading role. Uzbekistan places greater emphasis on legal regulation, scientific research, and international cultural diplomacy, whereas Sri Lanka focuses more strongly on preserving living traditions through community participation and cultural tourism.

**Comparative Table: Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka**

Indicators	Uzbekistan	Sri Lanka
Main coordinating institution	Ministry of Culture	Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs
Research infrastructure	Research Institute of Cultural Studies and Intangible Cultural Heritage	National cultural and heritage research institutions
UNESCO-recognized heritage elements	Shashmaqom, Askiya, Palov Culture, Lazgi, Bakhshi Art	Kandyan Dance, Ritual Traditions, Traditional Performing Arts
Heritage management model	State-centered approach	Community-based approach
Main promotion mechanisms	International festivals, cultural forums, state programs	Cultural tourism, religious festivals, community events
Transmission of heritage	Educational institutions, creative schools, state-supported programs	Master-apprentice system, community traditions
International cooperation	UNESCO projects, international conferences, cultural diplomacy	UNESCO cooperation, cultural tourism partnerships
Role of local communities	Supporting role within state programs	Central role in preservation and transmission processes

In 2022, during the 17th Session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Rabat, Morocco, two cultural elements nominated by Uzbekistan—“Traditional Silk Production for Weaving” and “Traditions of Telling Anecdotes about Khoja Nasreddin” were inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In the same year, Uzbekistan was elected to membership in the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage during the 9th Session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris[1].

It should be emphasized that the State Program “On the Protection, Preservation, Promotion and Utilization of Intangible Cultural Heritage Objects” assigns the task of regularly submitting information to UNESCO regarding intangible cultural heritage elements recommended for inclusion in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In accordance with this program, a comprehensive database of intangible cultural heritage objects has been established. This database accumulates information concerning activities undertaken by governmental bodies, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and public associations in the field of safeguarding, preserving, and promoting intangible cultural heritage.

Based on newly collected information, proposals are prepared and submitted to UNESCO Headquarters through the National Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan for UNESCO Affairs.

As a result of the measures implemented within the framework of the State Program, a number of intangible cultural heritage elements nominated by Uzbekistan have been successfully inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. These achievements have contributed significantly to enhancing Uzbekistan’s international prestige and strengthening its position within the history of world cultural heritage.

A notable example is the First International Handicrafts Festival held under the auspices of UNESCO in Kokand from 10 to 15 September 2019. The festival was followed by the awarding of the title “World City of Craftsmen” to Kokand by the World Crafts Council. Furthermore, international cultural events such as the International Festival of Bakhshi Art in Termez, the International Maqom Art Festival in Shahrisabz, the “Silk and Spices” Festival in Bukhara, and the “Atlas Festival” in Margilan became vivid demonstrations of the global recognition of Uzbek traditional arts and crafts.

To further develop national culture, create a new history of Uzbekistan, improve the spiritual and educational level of the population, preserve and popularize tangible and intangible cultural heritage, strengthen integration into the global cultural space, enhance the material and technical base of cultural institutions, and support cultural workers, comprehensive reforms have been implemented throughout the country.

In this regard, particular importance should be attached to the legal framework established by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Among the most significant documents are:

- Resolution No. PQ-4038 of 28 November 2018 “On Approval of the Concept for Further Development of National Culture in the Republic of Uzbekistan”;
- Resolution No. PQ-4068 of 19 December 2018 “On Measures for the Radical Improvement of Activities in the Field of Protection of Cultural Heritage Objects”;
- Resolution No. PQ-4730 of 26 May 2020 “On Measures to Improve the Activities of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan”;
- Presidential Decree No. PF-6000 of 26 May 2020 “On Measures to Further Enhance the Role and Influence of Culture and Art in Society.”

These legal acts have served as a solid foundation for the modernization and development of Uzbekistan's cultural sphere.

Particular attention has also been paid to safeguarding, researching, and promoting intangible cultural heritage elements, especially maqom and baxshi performing arts. Within the framework of the "Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy," the Presidential Resolution "On Additional Measures for the Development of Safeguarding, Scientific Research and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage" (No. PQ-405, 25 December 2023) clearly defined the strategic objectives of state policy in this area [2].

According to this resolution, the development of intangible cultural heritage is based on an integrated and continuous system encompassing preservation, transmission, restoration, and popularization. The document also provides for the establishment of scientific, practical, and creative schools aimed at ensuring the comprehensive development of intangible cultural heritage traditions.

The resolution further emphasizes the need for in-depth research into intangible cultural heritage, including its theoretical foundations and its relationship with national and universal human values. It calls for active cooperation between domestic scholars and international experts in conducting new scientific research and producing academic publications dedicated to the study of intangible cultural heritage[3].

In recent years, numerous regulatory and legal documents have been adopted in New Uzbekistan to improve public administration in the fields of culture and art. As part of these reforms, the Research Institute of Cultural Studies and Intangible Cultural Heritage was established under the Ministry of Culture by Presidential Decree of 27 July 2023.

The institute has been entrusted with a number of important responsibilities, including:

- developing theoretical and methodological foundations for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage;
- maintaining the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements;
- documenting, monitoring, and preserving heritage elements throughout the country;
- preparing educational standards, curricula, textbooks, teaching manuals, and methodological recommendations;
- producing audio, video, electronic educational resources, and online courses related to intangible cultural heritage.

In recent years, international experts have also been actively involved in projects aimed at safeguarding unique cultural heritage sites in Uzbekistan and developing master plans and management strategies for historic cities in accordance with UNESCO standards and requirements.

In close cooperation with UNESCO, numerous international conferences, symposiums, and forums dedicated to the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage have been organized. These events have provided opportunities to discuss pressing issues related to cultural heritage protection, study international best practices, improve the national heritage management system, and identify key areas of cooperation among governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, and civil society.

**Conclusion:** The experiences of Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka confirm that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage requires both effective state support and active participation of local communities. While Uzbekistan has achieved significant progress through legislative reforms, institutional development, and international cultural initiatives, Sri Lanka has demonstrated the importance of preserving living traditions through community engagement and cultural tourism. The study indicates that a balanced model incorporating both approaches may provide the most sustainable framework for preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage in the modern world.

## REFERENCES

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