

Fusion of tradition and modernity: Digital inheritance and sustainable protection of Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage

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Abstract: Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH), including oral epics, crafts, and rituals, faces threats from modernization, globalization, and insufficient policy support. This study explores the challenges of ICH transmission and proposes strategies for sustainable safeguarding through digital innovation, community collaboration, and transnational cooperation. Qualitative research was undertaken via literature review (30+ sources), semi-structured interviews (20 participants), and participatory observation in Bishkek and rural areas (2023–2024). Results: Key challenges include declining youth engagement, economic marginalization of traditional crafts, and fragmented policy implementation. Digital tools and transnational partnerships offer transformative potential but risk cultural dilution. A holistic safeguarding framework integrating legislation, education, community action, and technology is essential for preserving Kyrgyz ICH. Policymakers must prioritize cross-sectoral collaboration, digitization, and youth engagement to align with UNESCO's goals for ICH sustainability.

Keywords: *Intangible cultural heritage, Kyrgyzstan, Policy reform, Transmission mechanism.*

1. Introduction

Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH), such as the Manas* epic and felt craftsmanship, embodies national identity but faces existential threats from urbanisation, globalisation and policy gaps. This study addresses the question: How can Kyrgyzstan safeguard its ICH through innovative, community-driven strategies while balancing tradition and modernity?

Kyrgyzstan, situated between the Tien Shan and the Pamir Plateau, has historically retained a strong nomadic culture and absorbed sedentary civilisation. For a long time, the rich and diverse ICH has constituted the country's unique cultural landscape and an important pillar of national identity, for instance the oral epic Manas, the improvised duet of Ayits, the craftsmanship of felt carpets and white felt hats – all embodying the distinctive artistic charms and social values of traditional culture [1]. However, with the acceleration of globalisation and modernisation, traditional cultural heritage in Kyrgyzstan faces issues such as population mobility, the impact of urbanisation, insufficient economic returns and poor policy and financial support, which have placed many precious cultural items on the brink of loss.

In recent years, the international community has increasingly emphasised the protection and transmission of ICH. UNESCO has provided a legal basis and practical guidance for global ICH protection through the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and countries have achieved certain results in legislation, financial support, digital protection, community participation and transnational cooperation. In Central Asia, countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan share a long tradition of nomadic herding and multiculturalism with Kyrgyzstan; however, deficiencies in the overall level of cultural heritage preservation and resource integration remain [2].

The aim of this study is to systematically explore the current status of ICH transmission in Kyrgyzstan, its main challenges and intrinsic social functions, and to propose forward-looking and innovative safeguarding strategies based on a qualitative research methodology that utilises documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and participatory observation.

1.1. The Main Research Questions of This Paper Include

1. What are the specific cultural values embodied in the social life of contemporary Kyrgyz ICH?
2. What are the limitations of traditional transmission mechanisms, such as oral and verbal transmission, in the process of modernisation?
3. How do multiple factors such as the economy, policy, urbanisation, etc., affect ICH?
4. How can the sustainable transmission and innovative development of ICH be promoted through digitisation, cross-sectoral collaboration and transnational cooperation while maintaining traditional core values?

1.2. The Research Implications of This Paper Are

1. To enrich theoretical research in the field of safeguarding ICH in Kyrgyzstan, and propose a set of safeguarding strategies that meet the requirements of international conventions and are integrated into local practice;
2. To provide decision-making references for the government, communities and international cooperation agencies when formulating policies and measures for ICH safeguarding;
3. To explore the role of digitisation and innovative applications in the protection of ICH, thereby providing new ideas for the modern transformation of traditional culture.

2. Research Background and Literature Review

2.1. Diversity of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's ICH is distinctly pluralistic and geographically specific. Its cultural heritage encompasses not only oral epics, improvised duets and traditional rituals, but also rich handicrafts and folk games. For example, the oral epic *Manas*, one of the longest epics in the world, is not only a bearer of the legends of national heroes but also an important symbol of Kyrgyz historical memory and cultural identity. Meanwhile, activities such as ayatis duets, goat-carrying competitions and eagle-taming demonstrate a unique understanding of bodily expression, intelligence and social norms inherent in nomadic culture.

Several studies have demonstrated that the plurality of Kyrgyzstan's heritage is reflected in the composite nature of its transmission methods, content and functions. Traditional oral transmission, family gatherings and community rituals together constitute the country's cultural transmission network, which is both strongly localised and exhibits certain transnational commonalities [3]. In addition, the introduction of digital technology is gradually transforming the way traditional culture is transmitted, enabling some elements to gain wider attention and dissemination on a global scale [4].

2.2. International and Regional Heritage Conservation Practices

In the context of globalisation and the information age, safeguarding ICH has become an issue of general concern. Since the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage came into force, a variety of safeguarding models have emerged internationally, such as community-led models, digital archive construction, cultural tourism development and transnational cooperation. In the Central Asian region, there are both commonalities and individual characteristics in traditional culture preservation among countries. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which share a long history of nomadic culture and folklore traditions with Kyrgyzstan, have in recent years promoted the joint protection of cultural heritage through transnational declarations, regional cultural festivals and cross-border cultural exchanges [5].

Transnational conservation practices have shown that, through joint declarations and regional cooperation, not only can the international visibility of each country's heritage programme be increased, but also the complementarity of technology, funding and experience can be realised. For example, the Aites duet singing and traditional felt house making are practised in several Central Asian countries; through transnational cultural festival activities, traditional culture has been widely disseminated while also promoting economic cooperation in the fields of culture and tourism [6].

2.3. Limitations of Existing Research and Significance of This Study

At present, most academic studies on Kyrgyzstan's ICH focus on a single cultural element—such as oral epics, traditional handicrafts or folklore festivals—and lack comprehensive, comparative studies that fully reveal the intrinsic links between different elements and their multiple functions in modern society. Moreover, the adaptability and innovativeness of traditional transmission methods in the face of modern social changes have not been sufficiently discussed, especially given the waning interest among the younger generation, insufficient economic returns and inadequate policy support; thus, building a sustainable transmission mechanism has become an urgent issue.

This study aims to supplement this gap by placing various cultural elements under a unified analytical framework using qualitative research methods to comprehensively explore their transmission mechanisms, challenges and opportunities for future development. The study not only focuses on traditional oral and ritual transmission, but also incorporates digital transformation, cross-sectoral synergies and transnational cooperation into the discussion, thereby proposing innovative preservation strategies tailored to the realities of Kyrgyzstan and providing forward-looking guidance for ICH safeguarding [7].



Figure 1. Kyrgyz traditional felt carpet art Inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2012 Collection of the National Museum of the Kyrgyz Republic Photograph: Kun Li.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm to explore the transmission and preservation of ICH in Kyrgyzstan through a multifaceted and multilevel empirical analysis. The study population includes government officials from cultural departments, folk artists, traditional craft bearers, scholars in ethnography and cultural studies, and community members.

The core issues of the study are centred on the following four areas:

1. What is the current status of cultural heritage in Kyrgyzstan and how does it function in society?
2. What are the shortcomings and challenges of traditional transmission mechanisms in the process of modernisation and transformation?
3. What are the respective roles of government, community and transnational cooperation in the protection of ICH?
4. How can a forward-looking, systematic and sustainable safeguarding strategy for ICH be constructed?

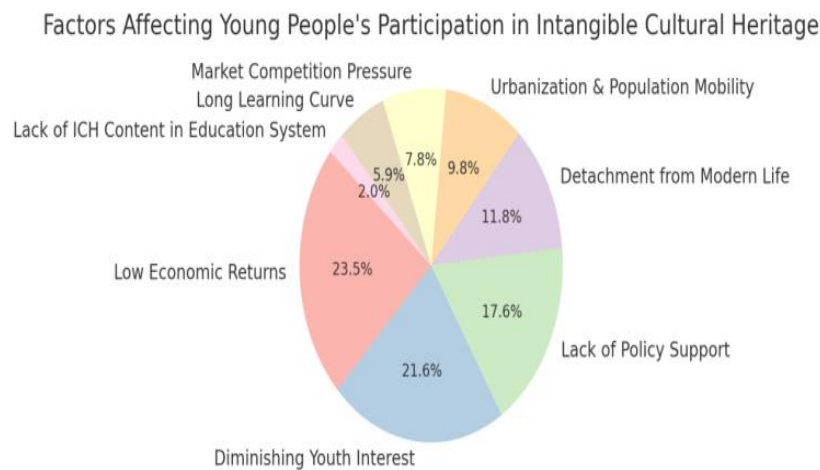


Figure 2.
Weights of Factors Influencing the Willingness of Youth to Pass On.

3.2. Description

Percentage of responses: indicates the number of times the option was selected as a proportion of the total number of responses (255). For example, 23.5% of responses noted “low financial rewards”, 21.6% noted “loss of youth interest and low social acceptance”, with inadequate policy support and disconnection from modern life following closely behind.

Main findings: Declining interest among youth is due to loss of interest among youth due to insufficient financial rewards, which is the most common major obstacle, followed by disconnection from modern life and policy reasons, while high pressure on employment and long study cycles are also among the secondary reasons.

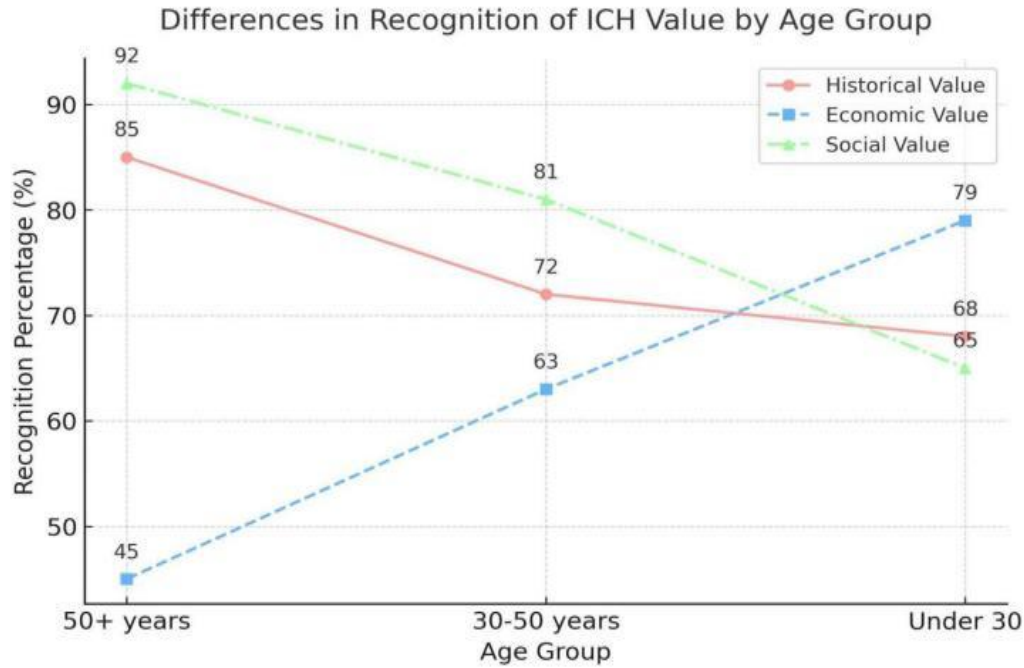


Figure 3.
Line graph of perceived value of NRM by age group.

3.3. Qualitative-Quantitative Hybrid Discovery Example

Research Person: “My son thinks that making felt hats has no future and would rather work as a security guard in a shopping mall” (white felt hat inheritor, 62 years old)

Corresponding data: Only 15% of people under 30 years old think traditional crafts have economic value.

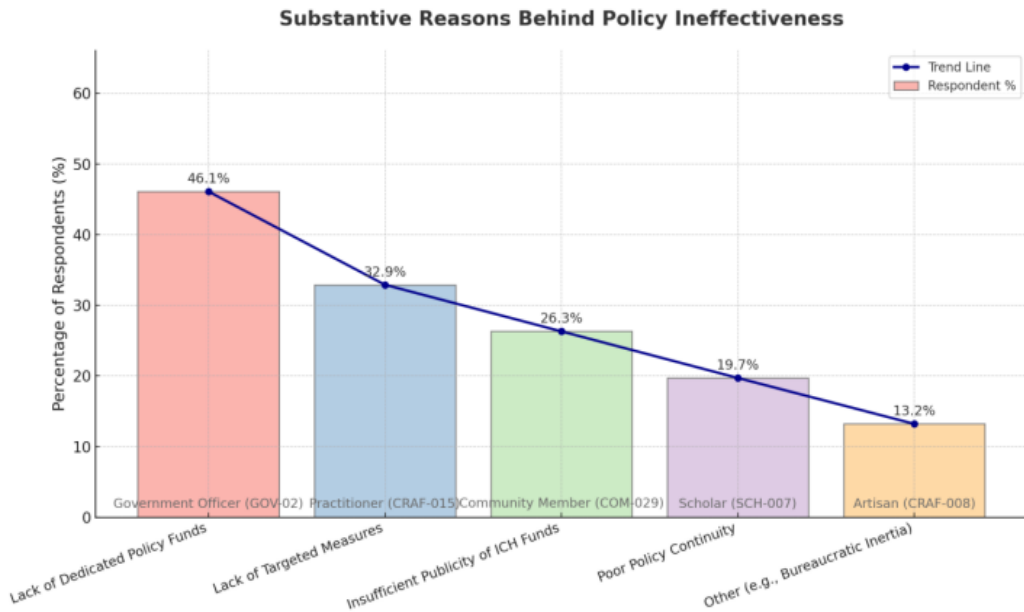


Figure 4.
Analysis of the reasons for the effectiveness of policies.

Problem Insight: Need to first address economic incentives (e.g., handicraft cooperative dividend mechanism, non-heritage fund) and modernization and transformation (e.g., non-heritage + digital cultural creation + self-media dissemination + short-video creation, non-heritage classroom, etc.) to increase the economic income and creative self-confidence of the non-heritage heritage.

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Literature Analysis

This study initially searched for and analysed academic papers, policy reports and news articles on ICH in Kyrgyzstan published on Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO and UNESCO's official website between 2018 and 2023, screening more than 30 pieces of literature. Through this analysis, the main models and experiences of current international and regional ICH preservation were identified, along with the types of ICH, transmission methods and main challenges in Kyrgyzstan [4].

3.4.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between June 2023 and July 2024 with 20 relevant practitioners and experts in order to obtain first-hand information. Interviewees included three government officials from cultural departments, five folk artists (covering Akan art inheritors, griot competitors, white felt hat craftsmen, etc.), four academics and eight community members (including young students and community elders). The interviews focused on the actual transmission process of ICH, the effects of policy implementation, economic benefits and community participation, as well as the impact of modernisation on traditional culture and its coping strategies.

3.4.3. Participatory Observation

The research team travelled to Bishkek and its surrounding areas during June 2023 and July 2024 to conduct on-site observations of cultural festivals, traditional ceremonies and folklore events. By participating in activities such as griot competitions, ayatis duets, felt carpet making and white felt hat craft workshops, the researcher documented in detail the actual process of traditional cultural transmission and community interactions, thereby providing rich field data for subsequent analysis [6].

3.5. Data Analysis

This study primarily employed Grounded Theory to transcribe and code interview transcripts and observation notes in detail. Through open, axial and selective coding, themes such as “family and community inheritance”, “economic and market pressure”, “policy and financial support” and “digitisation and transnational cooperation” were identified. The data analysis not only reveals the internal mechanism of ICH transmission but also provides a theoretical and practical basis for constructing forward-looking conservation strategies [5].

3.6. Findings and Analysis

Through comprehensive analysis of the literature, interviews and on-site observation data, this chapter elaborates on the transmission mechanisms of Kyrgyzstan's ICH, the main challenges faced, and the safeguarding practices adopted by various parties to address these challenges, while proposing forward-looking and innovative solutions.

3.7. Transmission Mechanisms and Social Functions

3.7.1. Oral Transmission in Families and Communities

Research shows that the core method of ICH transmission in Kyrgyzstan still relies on oral transmission within families and communities. The transmission of performing arts—such as the traditional oral epic *Manas* and the *Ayitse* duet—relies mainly on older inheritors instructing the younger generation through oral narratives and live demonstrations, a model that is highly interactive

and emotionally engaging [1]. During interviews, several inheritors emphasised that they transmit the essence of traditional culture through live performances and improvisations at family gatherings, festival ceremonies and community events [7].

In addition, traditional ceremonies and festivals play a pivotal role in transmission. Ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and Nowruz not only showcase skills but also strengthen social identity and national cohesion. For example, the use of white felt hat craft in traditional weddings serves not only as decoration but also symbolises family honour and cultural continuity. Elders often explain the cultural significance behind the ceremony, making the craft an important medium for the community's spiritual sustenance [2].

3.7.2. Social Functions and Spiritual Support

The social function of ICH in Kyrgyzstan extends beyond cultural transmission; it also provides vital spiritual support and moral guidance. Traditional oral epics and rituals often offer emotional comfort during community crises. Several interviewees noted that activities such as epic singing and traditional rituals evoke collective memories and bolster psychological resilience and solidarity when communities face natural disasters or social conflicts.

Much of this spiritual and moral support arises from the values embedded in traditional culture. Many traditional rituals promote respect for the elderly, affection for the young and social solidarity, which are reinforced through oral transmission and ritual enactment, resulting in enduring social norms [5]. Moreover, intergenerational transmission involves older community members not only passing on skills through demonstration but also shaping the identity and sense of responsibility of the younger generation through cultural narratives [1].

3.7.3. Promotion of Inheritance through Digitisation and Modern Technology

With advancements in information technology, digital means have gradually entered the field of ICH transmission. During interviews, some inheritors mentioned they have begun to digitally preserve traditional oral narratives and technical processes by recording teaching videos, creating digital archives and broadcasting live online. This digital transformation opens entirely new possibilities for transmitting traditional culture, helping overcome geographical limitations and reducing transmission losses [4].

Digitisation has not only enabled traditional culture to gain greater global exposure but has also attracted many young people through interactive platforms. With technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), users can experience traditional crafts and rituals in a virtual environment, thereby revitalising traditional culture in the modern world. This integration of technology introduces modern elements into traditional culture while preserving its core spirit, making it an important direction for future safeguarding [3].

3.7.4. Forward Thinking and Conclusion

In summary, the transmission mechanism of Kyrgyzstan's ICH is characterised by distinctive oral traditions and rituals that play a crucial role in maintaining national identity, providing spiritual support and promoting cultural exchange. However, in the face of modern society and technological advances, traditional transmission methods are confronted with the dual challenges of transformation and innovation. In the future, digital transformation, cross-generational cooperation and cross-sectoral synergy will be essential to enhance both the quality and reach of traditional cultural inheritance. Only by actively integrating modern technology and management concepts while preserving traditional core values can a safeguarding system be built that meets international standards and retains local characteristics [4].



Figure 5.

Kyrgyz epic trilogy: 'Manas', 'Semit'i' and 'Setek', included in the list of masterpieces in 2013 Source: UNESCO World Heritage website.

3.8. Major Challenges and Threats

3.8.1. Declining Interest of the Younger Generation and Succession Gap

Under the influence of modernisation and globalisation, traditional cultural heritage in Kyrgyzstan faces declining interest among younger people. Several interviewees indicated that due to insufficient inclusion of traditional culture in school curricula and changes in family economic structures, the appeal of traditional skills has markedly diminished among youth [6]. The younger generation increasingly favours modern careers and international cultural trends, which undermines the traditional oral and master-apprentice transmission system. Urbanisation further exacerbates this issue, as many young people migrate from rural areas to large cities, thereby weakening traditional community structures that are vital for cultural transmission [5].

3.8.2. Insufficient Economic Returns and Fierce Market Competition

Economic viability is a crucial factor in the continuation of traditional culture. Traditional handicraft products often struggle to compete with modern industrial goods due to complex production processes and long production cycles. For instance, although felt carpets and white felt hats possess high cultural value and artistry, their market prices are frequently non-competitive due to high production costs, which demotivates inheritors from continuing their craft [7].

The influx of modern products and inexpensive synthetics further undermines traditional crafts. Many consumers opt for standardised products that are cheaper and more efficient, disregarding the

unique cultural value and craftsmanship of traditional goods. This not only reduces the income of inheritors but also diminishes the appeal of traditional skills, as young people are drawn to modern, industrial products, thereby widening the succession gap [4].

3.8.3. Inadequate Implementation of Policies and Systems

Although the Kyrgyz government has introduced various policies and revitalisation plans for ICH protection in recent years, significant shortcomings remain in their practical implementation. In some localities, there is a tendency to prioritise publicity over actual protection, focusing on short-term promotional effects while neglecting long-term investment in skill support and inheritor development [2]. Insufficient funding, inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and a lack of intersectoral coordination have all contributed to the underachievement of some conservation programmes, thereby hindering the sustainable development of ICH [1].

Even though policy formulation offers guidance for ICH protection, the absence of clear operational measures and targeted support results in misunderstandings and resource misallocations during implementation. Building a comprehensive policy system that appropriately allocates resources such as funds, talent and technology is an urgent institutional challenge.

3.8.4. Negative Impacts of Urbanisation and Population Mobility

The process of urbanisation and increased population mobility have seriously impacted traditional cultural heritage. As many rural inhabitants migrate to cities for economic opportunities, traditional family and community structures gradually disintegrate, placing community-based transmission at risk. Many traditional crafts and venues for oral transmission are being lost, leading to a disconnection in skill transmission [6].

Moreover, the spread of multicultural influences in urban areas weakens young people's identification with local traditions. The widespread prevalence of international popular culture and modern entertainment further marginalises traditional culture among the youth, which not only affects cultural transmission but also has long-term adverse effects on national identity and social cohesion [5].

3.8.5. Double-edged Sword Effect of Digital Transformation

While digital technology and digitisation offer significant opportunities for ICH preservation, they may also result in cultural fragmentation and superficial understanding. Although digitisation can preserve large volumes of traditional cultural material, ensuring the depth and emotional resonance of digital content remains a challenge. Furthermore, the digital divide between social groups may hinder the widespread dissemination of digital preservation outcomes, putting some traditional skills at risk of marginalization [3].

3.8.6. General Discussion

In sum, the challenges facing the transmission of ICH in Kyrgyzstan are multifaceted, intersecting and dynamic. The diminishing willingness of the younger generation to inherit traditional culture, insufficient economic returns, inadequate policy implementation, the effects of urbanisation and population mobility, and issues arising from digital transformation together constitute the bottlenecks that must be overcome in contemporary ICH safeguarding. Future conservation efforts should acknowledge the interrelated and systemic nature of these challenges and provide a theoretical and practical foundation for the next phase of strategic development.



Figure 6.

Kyrgyz Epic Playing and Singing Akan Art, included in the list of masterpieces in 2008 (originally published in 2003)

Source: UNESCO World Heritage website.

3.9. Response Strategies and Conservation Practices

In response to these challenges, this paper proposes the following countermeasures to establish a comprehensive and multidimensional safeguarding system for ICH.

3.9.1. Government Level: Improvement of Legislation and Policy Support

Firstly, the government should expedite the revision of the current Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage and develop specific Regulations on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, thereby clarifying the scope of protection, responsible bodies and financial support mechanisms. Drawing on UNESCO's experience, Kyrgyzstan can include oral epics, traditional handicrafts and ceremonial activities within the scope of legal protection, and establish a dedicated fund for ICH protection to ensure timely and transparent allocation of resources [1]. A hierarchical management structure at both central and local levels should be established, with protection measures continuously improved and refined through regular evaluation and public oversight [2].

Furthermore, establishing incentive schemes alongside monitoring and evaluation systems is key to effective policy implementation. The government could regularly recognise “outstanding inheritors” and “exemplary protection projects” by providing economic subsidies, tax incentives and training support. An online monitoring platform could also be set up to track the implementation of ICH projects in real time, ensuring that policies truly benefit inheritors and communities [4].

3.9.2. *Community-Led: Building a Collaborative Conservation Network*

As the primary custodians of traditional culture, communities offer inherent advantages in spontaneity and localised knowledge. To foster a community-led protection model, local ICH conservation councils—comprising inheritors, folk artists, community representatives and local government officials—should be established in culturally rich areas. These councils would formulate heritage transmission plans, organise skill exchanges and regular training based on local conditions, and enhance the market competitiveness of traditional skills through collective efforts [8].

Communities should also utilise digital platforms to create interactive ICH archives and exchange networks, thereby extending the reach of traditional culture via recorded teaching videos, online lectures and virtual experiences. In parallel, the formation of cooperatives and craft workshops can help modernise, package and brand traditional crafts to achieve mutual benefits in cultural preservation and economic development [7]. Cross-sectoral collaboration among government, educational institutions, cultural and tourism enterprises and research bodies is crucial to establish an “ICH conservation consortium” that pools resources, integrates strengths and provides technical, financial and marketing support to communities [2].

3.9.3. *Transnational Cooperation and Digital Innovation*

Given the transnational commonalities of Kyrgyzstan’s ICH, collaborative efforts across borders can share technology, funding and enhance international cultural visibility. Kyrgyzstan could jointly launch ICH preservation projects with neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, regularly organise regional cultural festivals and seminars, and establish a transnational cultural exchange network to jointly promote the inheritance and development of traditional culture [3].

Digital innovation also plays a vital role in modern ICH safeguarding. By establishing comprehensive digital archives and online management platforms to record traditional oral histories, production techniques and ritual practices, not only is information loss prevented but global dissemination is facilitated [4]. Furthermore, technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can be utilised to develop interactive applications that allow users to experience traditional skills in a virtual environment, thereby attracting younger audiences to ICH [1].

Digital technology can additionally support data monitoring and evaluation. Through big data and artificial intelligence, real-time analysis of ICH transmission status, economic benefits and community participation can be conducted to inform policy adjustments and programme improvements. The synergy of transnational cooperation and digital innovation will contribute to building an internationally competitive ICH protection system and offer valuable experience for global traditional culture safeguarding [2].

3.9.4. *Prospective Outlook of Innovative Ideas and Solutions*

Looking ahead, safeguarding ICH in Kyrgyzstan should balance heritage conservation with innovation. The government, communities and international institutions should collaboratively explore new transmission models—such as digital interactive classrooms, virtual ICH museums and transnational cultural exchange programmes—that compensate for the limitations of traditional methods while providing contemporary learning and participation opportunities [4].

In short, safeguarding practices should not only begin with policy and legislation, community collaboration and transnational cooperation but also fully leverage digital technology and modern management concepts to build a comprehensive, systematic ICH protection system. Future success in ICH safeguarding will enhance national cultural soft power and offer demonstrative experiences for traditional culture protection in Central Asia and beyond [2].



Figure 7.

Eight Kyrgyz equestrian events, including horse racing, horse wrestling and horse walking, have been included in the programme of the World Nomad Games Photograph: Yang Da.

4. Discussion

4.1. *The Importance of Synergy Among Multiple Stakeholders*

The research reveals that the preservation and transmission of ICH in Kyrgyzstan cannot be achieved by a single entity alone. Government bodies, communities, educational institutions, civil society organisations and international partners must work together to create a synergy that compensates for individual resource shortcomings while integrating their strengths from top-level design to grassroots practice. For example, while the government formulates and implements protection policies and provides financial support and incentives, communities and civic organisations ensure continuous transmission of traditional skills through collaborative approaches, and transnational cooperation and digital innovation inject modern vitality and international influence into traditional culture [2].

4.2. *Balancing Transmission and Innovation*

Safeguarding ICH requires a balance between preserving tradition and embracing moderate innovation. Traditional and modern elements need not be in opposition; rather, they can complement one another. Research indicates that by introducing modern technologies and management methods such as digitisation, virtual experiences and cross-sectoral cooperation, traditional skills can both

maintain their original form and contribute more effectively to economic and social development [4]. For instance, the ayites duet form, after incorporating modern elements, has retained the essence of traditional improvisation while attracting a large number of young audiences through webcasting and interactive platforms. Preventing over-commercialisation and performativity during innovation while maintaining intrinsic authenticity remains a key challenge.

4.3. Cultural Identity and Social Cohesion

ICH plays a unique role in maintaining national identity and enhancing social cohesion. Research has found that Kyrgyz epic singing, traditional rituals and handicrafts not only serve as carriers of cultural memory but also as vital links that promote community unity and intergenerational exchange. Traditional cultural activities provide psychological comfort and emotional support while fostering common values and behavioural norms, thereby helping communities maintain stability and resilience in the face of modern pressures. In the future, leveraging traditional culture to bolster national identity and social cohesion while promoting ICH protection will be an important policy focus.

4.4. Opportunities and Challenges in the Digital Age

The rapid progress of information technology has brought unprecedented opportunities for digital conservation of traditional culture. However, digitisation also poses challenges in terms of potential information fragmentation and superficial understanding. While digital archives, virtual reality and online education can dramatically expand the reach of traditional culture, ensuring the depth and emotional impact of digital content remains a common challenge for integrating technology with culture [4]. Moreover, the digital divide between urban and rural areas, as well as across different social groups, may lead to unequal dissemination of digital outcomes, necessitating careful attention to balance and inclusion.

4.5. General Discussion and Future Perspectives

Overall, the future development of ICH safeguarding in Kyrgyzstan depends on the synergistic cooperation of multiple stakeholders, the balance between heritage and innovation, and the opportunities afforded by digital transformation. The strategies discussed in this paper—improving legislation, promoting community-led initiatives, fostering transnational cooperation and embracing digital innovation—offer both theoretical and practical support for the continued transmission of traditional culture. Looking ahead, Kyrgyzstan must actively explore new transmission models that meet modern societal needs while preserving the essence of tradition, thus building a sustainable and internationally competitive ICH protection system [3].



Figure 8. Midwifery: knowledge, skills and practices, inscribed on the Representative List in 2023. Source: UNESCO World Heritage website.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Main Conclusions

Through literature review, semi-structured interviews and participatory observation, this study has systematically examined the current state of ICH transmission in Kyrgyzstan, its major challenges and its intrinsic social functions. The principal findings are as follows:

1. ICH transmission in Kyrgyzstan is primarily based on oral transmission from family to community, with rituals and festivals playing a crucial role in strengthening national identity and social cohesion.
2. The diminishing willingness of the younger generation to inherit traditional culture, coupled with insufficient economic returns, inadequate policy implementation and the effects of urbanisation, constitute the main challenges.
3. Digital transformation and transnational cooperation provide entirely new opportunities for ICH preservation, but also risk cultural fragmentation and superficial understanding.
4. Effective safeguarding requires the joint efforts of governments, communities and transnational partners to develop a protection system that upholds traditional core values while incorporating modern technology and management principles.

5.2. Suggested Responses

To address these challenges and promote sustainable ICH transmission in Kyrgyzstan, the following countermeasures are proposed:

5.2.1. Improve Legislation and Policy Support

The government should expedite the revision of the current Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage and develop specific Regulations on the Protection of ICH to clarify the scope of protection, designate responsible bodies and establish financial support mechanisms. A hierarchical management system should be set up between central and local levels, along with a dedicated fund to ensure timely and transparent investment in protection projects. Additionally, incentive schemes and robust monitoring and evaluation systems—such as recognising “outstanding inheritors” and “exemplary protection projects” with economic subsidies, tax incentives and training support—should be implemented [4].

5.2.2. Strengthening Education and Publicity

Traditional culture should be incorporated into the curricula of primary and secondary schools as well as higher education institutions, and comprehensive ICH teaching materials should be compiled to facilitate experiential learning and cultural workshops. Modern communication channels, including digital media, social platforms and online live broadcasts, should be employed to produce documentaries, teaching videos and interactive courses that expand the reach of traditional culture. Transnational cultural exchange activities and international seminars can further enhance the global visibility of Kyrgyzstan’s traditional culture and inject new vitality into heritage transmission [6].

5.2.3. Promoting Community-Led and Cross-Sectoral Synergy

Local ICH conservation councils, comprising inheritors, folk artists, community representatives and local government officials, should be established in culturally rich areas. These councils would organise regular skill exchanges, experience transfer sessions and competitions to modernise, package and market traditional skills. Digital platforms can be leveraged to create interactive ICH archives and knowledge-sharing spaces, while cooperatives and craft workshops help bridge cultural preservation and economic development. Collaboration among government, educational institutions, tourism enterprises and cultural organisations is essential to form a comprehensive “ICH conservation consortium” [7].

5.2.4. Promote Transnational Cooperation and Cultural Tourism

Kyrgyzstan should strengthen ties with neighbouring Central Asian countries and other culturally linked nations by jointly declaring ICH preservation projects and co-organising regional cultural festivals and seminars. Transnational platforms can facilitate the sharing of conservation experiences and financial resources, while the integration of ICH resources can lead to the creation of culturally distinctive and internationally competitive tourism brands. Digital and social media promotion should be utilised to develop tourism products centred on traditional culture, thereby achieving dual benefits in heritage protection and economic growth.

5.2.5. Promote Digitisation and Innovative Applications

Establish digital archives and online management platforms to record and preserve traditional oral histories, craft techniques and ritual practices. The use of VR and AR technologies can foster interactive applications that allow users to virtually experience traditional culture. Concurrently, big data and artificial intelligence should be employed to build a dynamic monitoring and evaluation system that informs policy adjustments and programme improvements. Promoting the formation of a digital innovation alliance for ICH, and encouraging cross-border cooperation among governments, research institutions and enterprises, will help explore new models for traditional culture protection.

5.3. Future Prospects

In the future, safeguarding ICH in Kyrgyzstan will face an increasingly complex internal and external environment. Digital transformation, globalisation and regional cooperation will bring new opportunities for ICH preservation; however, balancing heritage conservation with innovation and market forces remains essential. The countermeasures proposed herein are both forward-looking in theory and actionable in practice, addressing issues such as the disconnect in transmission, insufficient economic incentives and ineffective policy implementation. Ultimately, only through the concerted synergy of government, community, transnational cooperation and digital innovation can an internationally competitive and sustainable ICH protection system be established—contributing valuable experience to the global safeguarding of traditional culture.



Figure 9. Elechek, Kyrgyz female headwear: traditional knowledge and rituals, inscribed on the Representative List in 2023. Source: UNESCO World Heritage website.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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