



## Intangible Cultural Heritage and Its Role in Society

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Received: 25/12/2025; Accepted: 20/05/2026; Published: 26/05/2026

### Abstract

Intangible cultural heritage represents the living traditions, practices, and expressions that communities inherit from their ancestors and transmit across generations. In contemporary society, these non-material aspects of culture—such as language, rituals, performing arts, and traditional knowledge—play a crucial role in shaping identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. However, rapid globalization, modernization, and technological change have placed intangible cultural heritage at risk. This paper examines the significance of intangible cultural heritage in maintaining cultural diversity and social stability. It also explores the role of institutions such as UNESCO in safeguarding these traditions. The study highlights the need for community participation, policy support, and digital preservation strategies to ensure the survival and relevance of intangible cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords:** Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural Identity; Traditions; Oral Heritage; Social

### Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage forms an essential part of human civilization, encompassing the living traditions, expressions, and practices that define communities and societies. Unlike tangible heritage, which includes physical artifacts and monuments, intangible cultural heritage consists of non-material elements such as language, folklore, rituals, performing arts, and traditional knowledge. These elements are passed down through generations and play a vital role in preserving cultural identity and continuity.

In contemporary society, intangible cultural heritage serves as a foundation for social cohesion and collective identity. It provides individuals with a sense of belonging and connection to their cultural roots. Festivals, oral traditions, and community practices strengthen social bonds and reinforce shared values within communities.

However, the rapid pace of globalization and modernization has created significant challenges for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The dominance of global cultures, changing lifestyles, and technological advancements have led to the decline of many traditional practices and languages. Younger generations may become disconnected from their cultural heritage, resulting in the gradual loss of cultural knowledge. At the same time, new opportunities have emerged for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. International organizations such as UNESCO have developed frameworks and programs to protect and promote cultural traditions worldwide. Digital technologies also offer innovative ways to document and preserve cultural expressions, making them accessible to a wider audience. aims to explore the role of intangible



cultural heritage in society, examining its importance in maintaining cultural identity, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring cultural continuity in the face of modern challenges.

### **Concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the non-material aspects of culture that are passed down from generation to generation within communities. These include traditions, practices, expressions, knowledge systems, and skills that form the living cultural identity of a society. Unlike tangible heritage, which consists of physical objects and monuments, intangible heritage is dynamic and continuously recreated in response to changing social environments. It encompasses elements such as oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festivals, and traditional craftsmanship. These practices are deeply embedded in the daily lives of people and reflect their values, beliefs, and ways of understanding the world. For example, traditional storytelling, folk music, and community rituals are all expressions of intangible cultural heritage. The significance of intangible cultural heritage lies in its ability to preserve cultural continuity. It connects past generations with the present and ensures that cultural knowledge and traditions are transmitted to future generations. Institutions such as UNESCO have emphasized the importance of safeguarding intangible heritage as a vital component of human cultural diversity.

### **2. Types of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage can be categorized into several types, each representing different aspects of cultural expression and knowledge:

#### **1. Oral Traditions and Expressions**

These include storytelling, proverbs, myths, and languages that convey cultural knowledge and history. Oral traditions are often the primary means through which cultural values are transmitted.

#### **2. Performing Arts**

This category includes music, dance, theatre, and other artistic performances. Traditional dances and folk music reflect the cultural identity and creativity of communities.

#### **3. Social Practices, Rituals, and Festivals**

Cultural ceremonies, religious rituals, and festivals are important expressions of community life. They reinforce shared beliefs and strengthen social bonds.

#### **4. Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe**

This includes traditional knowledge related to agriculture, medicine, and environmental practices. Indigenous knowledge systems often reflect a deep understanding of nature and sustainability.

#### **5. Traditional Craftsmanship**

Skills involved in creating handicrafts, textiles, and artisanal products are also part of intangible heritage. These crafts represent cultural traditions and are often passed down through generations.



### **Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Identity**

Intangible cultural heritage holds immense importance in society as it contributes to identity, continuity, and cultural diversity. It serves as a foundation for understanding who we are and how we relate to our cultural roots. One of its primary roles is in shaping identity. Cultural practices, languages, and traditions provide individuals with a sense of belonging and self-understanding. They connect people to their community and heritage, reinforcing both individual and collective identity.

Intangible cultural heritage also ensures cultural continuity. By passing traditions and knowledge from one generation to another, societies maintain a link with their past. This continuity helps preserve cultural values and prevents the loss of important traditions. Furthermore, it promotes cultural diversity. In a globalized world, intangible heritage represents the uniqueness of different cultures. It enriches societies by fostering creativity, innovation, and mutual respect among diverse cultural groups. In addition, intangible cultural heritage strengthens social cohesion. Shared traditions and practices bring people together, creating a sense of unity and community. Festivals, rituals, and cultural events provide opportunities for collective participation and social bonding. Intangible cultural heritage plays a vital role in society by preserving identity, ensuring continuity, and promoting diversity. Protecting and sustaining these cultural expressions is essential for maintaining the richness of human civilization in an ever-changing world.

#### **How traditions shape individual and collective identity.**

Traditions play a fundamental role in shaping both individual and collective identity by providing a sense of continuity, belonging, and cultural meaning. They consist of shared practices, beliefs, and customs that are passed down through generations, forming the foundation of how individuals understand themselves and their place in society. At the individual level, traditions contribute to identity by influencing values, behaviors, and worldviews. From childhood, people are exposed to cultural practices such as festivals, rituals, language, and family customs. These experiences shape personal identity by instilling a sense of cultural belonging and guiding moral and social understanding. For example, participation in traditional ceremonies or celebrations helps individuals connect with their heritage and develop a sense of pride in their cultural background.

At the collective level, traditions unify groups of people by creating a shared cultural identity. Communities that follow common customs and practices develop a sense of collective belonging and solidarity. These shared traditions reinforce group identity and distinguish one community from another. They also serve as a means of preserving cultural uniqueness in a diverse and globalized world. Traditions also provide continuity across generations. By passing cultural knowledge and practices from elders to younger members, societies maintain a connection with their past. This continuity helps preserve cultural memory and ensures that important values and beliefs are not lost over time. However, traditions are not static; they evolve in response to social changes. While they adapt to modern contexts, their core



significance in shaping identity remains strong. Thus, traditions are essential in forming both personal identity and collective cultural consciousness.

### **Role in Social Cohesion and Community Bonding**

Intangible cultural heritage plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and strengthening community bonds. Shared cultural practices and traditions bring individuals together, fostering a sense of unity, cooperation, and mutual understanding within communities. One of the primary ways in which cultural heritage promotes social cohesion is through collective participation. Festivals, rituals, and community events encourage people to come together and engage in shared experiences. These gatherings create opportunities for interaction, cooperation, and the reinforcement of social ties.

Community bonding is also strengthened through shared values and beliefs. Cultural practices often reflect common moral principles and social norms, which guide behavior and promote harmony within the group. By participating in these practices, individuals develop a sense of responsibility and connection to their community. Intangible cultural heritage also supports intergenerational relationships. Elders play a key role in transmitting cultural knowledge and traditions to younger generations. This exchange fosters respect, understanding, and continuity, strengthening the social fabric of the community. Moreover, cultural practices can help bridge social differences. In diverse societies, shared traditions and cultural events can promote inclusion and mutual respect among different groups. They provide common ground for interaction, reducing social divisions and fostering unity. , intangible cultural heritage is essential for maintaining social cohesion and community bonding. By bringing people together through shared practices and values, it strengthens relationships and contributes to the stability and harmony of society.

### **Strengthening relationships through shared cultural practices.**

Shared cultural practices play a vital role in strengthening relationships within families, communities, and societies. Activities such as festivals, rituals, traditional ceremonies, and communal celebrations create opportunities for individuals to come together, interact, and build meaningful connections. One of the key ways these practices strengthen relationships is through collective participation. When people engage in cultural events together, they share experiences that foster trust, cooperation, and emotional bonding. For example, community festivals and religious gatherings encourage interaction among individuals, helping to reinforce social ties and a sense of unity.

Shared cultural practices also promote mutual understanding and respect. They provide a platform for individuals to learn about each other's traditions, beliefs, and values. This is especially important in diverse societies, where such interactions can reduce misunderstandings and strengthen harmony among different cultural groups. Family relationships are also reinforced through cultural traditions. Celebrations, rituals, and customary practices bring family members together, creating shared memories and



strengthening emotional connections across generations. These practices help maintain continuity and preserve cultural values within families. Additionally, shared cultural practices contribute to a sense of belonging. Individuals feel connected to their community when they participate in common traditions, which enhances social cohesion and collective identity. Shared cultural practices are essential for building and maintaining strong relationships. They foster unity, understanding, and cooperation, contributing to a more cohesive and connected society.

### **Impact of Globalization on Intangible Heritage**

Globalization has had a significant impact on intangible cultural heritage, bringing both opportunities for cultural exchange and challenges related to cultural loss. Increased connectivity, communication, and mobility have allowed cultures to interact more frequently, influencing traditions, practices, and cultural expressions. On one hand, globalization promotes cultural exchange. People are exposed to diverse traditions, languages, and artistic expressions through media, travel, and digital platforms. This interaction encourages creativity and the development of hybrid cultural forms that combine elements from different cultures. However, globalization also poses serious threats to intangible cultural heritage. The spread of dominant global cultures can overshadow local traditions, leading to cultural homogenization. Traditional practices, languages, and customs may decline as younger generations adopt global lifestyles and values. Another challenge is the commercialization of culture. Cultural practices may be altered or simplified to appeal to global audiences, which can reduce their authenticity and cultural significance. This process may transform meaningful traditions into mere performances or commodities. At the same time, globalization offers tools for preservation. Digital platforms enable communities to document and share their cultural practices with a global audience, increasing awareness and support for heritage conservation. In short, globalization is a double-edged phenomenon for intangible cultural heritage. While it facilitates cultural interaction and innovation, it also threatens the survival of traditional practices. Balancing global influences with the preservation of local identity is essential to ensure the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage.

### **Cultural exchange vs loss of traditions.**

The interaction between cultural exchange and the loss of traditions represents a central tension in the contemporary globalized world. Cultural exchange occurs when societies interact and share ideas, practices, and values, leading to mutual enrichment and the development of new cultural forms. Through media, migration, and digital connectivity, people are exposed to diverse traditions, languages, and lifestyles, which can enhance creativity and broaden perspectives. However, this exchange often comes with the risk of losing traditional cultural practices. The dominance of global cultural influences, frequently amplified through platforms like YouTube and Instagram, can overshadow local customs and values. As younger generations adopt global trends, traditional practices may gradually decline or be replaced. This process can lead to cultural homogenization, where distinct cultural identities become less visible or disappear entirely. Languages, rituals, and traditional knowledge systems are



particularly vulnerable, as they rely heavily on active participation and transmission across generations.

At the same time, cultural exchange is not entirely negative. It can encourage adaptation and innovation, allowing traditions to evolve and remain relevant in modern contexts. The key challenge lies in maintaining a balance—embracing global influences while preserving the core elements of local cultural identity. Cultural exchange offers opportunities for growth and interaction, but it must be managed carefully to prevent the erosion of valuable cultural traditions.

### **Threats to Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage faces numerous threats in the context of rapid social and technological change. These threats arise primarily from processes such as modernization, urbanization, and generational gaps, all of which influence how cultural traditions are practiced and transmitted. Modernization often leads to the adoption of new lifestyles and values that may not align with traditional practices. As societies become more focused on economic development and technological progress, cultural traditions may be viewed as outdated or less relevant. This can result in a decline in the practice and transmission of intangible heritage. Urbanization further intensifies these challenges. Migration from rural to urban areas disrupts traditional community structures where cultural practices are typically preserved. In urban settings, individuals may have fewer opportunities to participate in traditional activities, leading to a gradual loss of cultural knowledge.

Generational gaps also play a significant role. Younger generations, influenced by modern education, media, and global culture, may show less interest in learning traditional practices. This creates a break in the transmission of cultural heritage from elders to youth, threatening its continuity. Additionally, factors such as commercialization, environmental changes, and the decline of traditional occupations contribute to the vulnerability of intangible heritage. Practices that depend on specific cultural or environmental contexts may disappear if those conditions change. , intangible cultural heritage is at risk from multiple interconnected factors. Addressing these threats requires active efforts to promote awareness, encourage participation, and support the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations. Cultural exchange and the loss of traditions represent two interconnected outcomes of globalization and modernization. On one hand, cultural exchange promotes interaction between different societies, allowing people to share ideas, practices, languages, and artistic expressions. This interaction enriches cultures by encouraging creativity, innovation, and mutual understanding. Exposure to diverse traditions through travel, media, and digital platforms helps individuals broaden their perspectives and develop more inclusive worldviews.

However, this process also raises concerns about the loss of traditions. The widespread influence of global culture, often amplified through platforms like YouTube and Instagram, can overshadow local customs and practices. As people adopt global lifestyles, traditional values, languages, and rituals may gradually decline, especially among younger generations.



This phenomenon can lead to cultural homogenization, where distinct cultural identities become less visible or disappear altogether. Unique traditions that once defined communities may be replaced by standardized global practices, reducing cultural diversity. At the same time, cultural exchange does not necessarily result in complete loss. In many cases, cultures adapt and integrate new influences while preserving their core traditions. This process creates hybrid cultural forms that reflect both local and global elements.

The key challenge lies in maintaining a balance between embracing cultural exchange and safeguarding traditional practices. Promoting cultural awareness, encouraging community participation, and supporting preservation initiatives can help ensure that cultural exchange enhances rather than diminishes cultural heritage. While cultural exchange offers opportunities for growth and connection, protecting traditions is essential for preserving cultural identity and diversity in an increasingly interconnected world.

### Conclusion

Cultural exchange and the loss of traditions are closely linked processes shaped by globalization and modernization. While cultural exchange fosters interaction, creativity, and mutual understanding among societies, it also creates challenges for the preservation of traditional practices and identities. As global influences become more dominant, especially through platforms like YouTube and Instagram, local cultures may face the risk of marginalization and gradual decline.

However, cultural transformation is not solely a process of loss. Many societies actively adapt to global influences while preserving essential elements of their cultural heritage, resulting in hybrid cultural forms. This demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of culture in a rapidly changing world. The key lies in achieving a balance between openness to cultural exchange and commitment to preserving traditions. Strengthening cultural awareness, promoting community participation, and implementing effective preservation strategies are essential steps in maintaining cultural diversity. Cultural exchange should be viewed not as a threat but as an opportunity—provided that efforts are made to safeguard traditions and ensure that cultural identity remains vibrant and meaningful for future generations.

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