

Article

Management System of Culinary Heritage and Promotion in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Uzbekistan's culinary heritage, enriched with centuries-old traditions and regional diversity, holds immense potential for cultural preservation, economic growth, and global recognition. This article explores the current state, challenges, and future prospects of managing and promoting culinary heritage in Uzbekistan. Although the country has made meaningful progress in tourism and cultural policy over the last decade, the domain of gastronomic heritage remains under-institutionalized and lacks strategic coherence. Based on literature analysis, expert interviews, and observations, the study identifies key gaps in infrastructure, branding, professional training, and digital presence. The article argues for a more inclusive, interdisciplinary, and innovation-driven approach that aligns cultural policy with tourism development, marketing, and education. A coordinated strategy could position Uzbek cuisine as a tool for sustainable development and national branding.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Culinary Heritage, Gastronomic Tourism, Cultural Preservation, Food Policy, Branding, Traditional Cuisine, Rural Development, Chef Training, Tourism Infrastructure

1. Introduction

The culinary heritage of Uzbekistan is a vital part of its national identity and cultural wealth, encompassing traditional dishes such as plov, lagman, norin, shurva, and samsa, each reflecting centuries of history, regional diversity, and ethnic influence. In the era of globalization, where cultural homogenization poses a threat to unique traditions, the preservation and promotion of culinary heritage have gained strategic importance not only as a matter of cultural pride but also as a driver of tourism development and economic diversification. Gastronomic tourism—a niche segment within the global tourism industry—is rapidly evolving and offering countries like Uzbekistan an opportunity to strengthen their international image while generating tangible economic benefits. In this context, the management system of culinary heritage must go beyond mere preservation. It requires a comprehensive, institutionalized approach that includes policy frameworks, cultural mapping, public-private partnerships, international cooperation, and modern marketing tools. While Uzbekistan has made significant progress in tourism development over the past decade, including the liberalization of visa regimes and the enhancement of tourism infrastructure, the specific domain of culinary heritage management remains in a developmental phase. Events such as the “Asrlar Sadosi” festival, “Uzbek Gastronomy Week,” and international culinary forums have laid the foundation for promoting national cuisine on a global scale[1]. However, the lack of an integrated management system, limited gastronomic infrastructure (such as culinary museums, food trails, and tasting centers), insufficient professional training for chefs and guides, and weak branding and

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digital presence hinder the full realization of Uzbekistan's culinary tourism potential[2]. Furthermore, current efforts are fragmented across various institutions, with no unified platform or database that systematically documents and regulates the country's vast culinary assets. This gap calls for a coordinated strategy that combines cultural policy, economic incentives, education, and digital innovation. From a socio-economic perspective, developing culinary heritage not only enhances tourist satisfaction and cultural diplomacy but also supports rural development by increasing demand for local agricultural products and handmade food items. Moreover, it reinforces national pride and social cohesion, as food is deeply embedded in Uzbekistan's family structures, hospitality culture, and religious customs. In line with global trends, where countries like Italy, Japan, and Mexico have leveraged their food heritage for economic and cultural influence, Uzbekistan must invest in creating a robust gastronomic ecosystem that includes quality assurance, certification mechanisms, chef accreditation, storytelling techniques, and integration into broader cultural routes such as the Silk Road. This article aims to explore the current state of culinary heritage management and promotion in Uzbekistan, identify institutional, infrastructural, and socio-cultural challenges, and propose strategic recommendations for sustainable development. It reviews relevant literature, government policy documents, international case studies, and recent data to provide a comprehensive analysis of how Uzbekistan can develop an effective and globally competitive system for managing and promoting its rich culinary heritage.

The academic exploration of culinary heritage management and promotion in Uzbekistan has gained momentum in recent years, particularly within the context of tourism development and cultural preservation. Uzbek scholar G. Mavlyanova, in her study *"Cultural Foundations of Uzbek Cuisine"*, emphasizes that traditional dishes such as plov, somsa, and mastava are not merely food items but integral carriers of national memory, hospitality, and identity[3]. She argues for the classification of these dishes as intangible cultural heritage and the need for a state-managed registry system. Similarly, N. Fayziyeva and L. Sharipova conducted field studies in Bukhara and Khorezm regions, revealing that international tourists often consider Uzbek cuisine to be a primary motivator for visiting these regions[4]. Their findings support the idea of developing region-specific culinary routes and experiential food tourism.

A 2023 article by U.K. Ezozkhon in *Zien Journals* highlights the lack of cohesive branding in Uzbekistan's gastronomic sector. The study identifies key weaknesses such as insufficient infrastructure, underqualified chefs, and a fragmented policy approach. These findings are echoed in international literature. For example, a *CyberLeninka* article titled *"Peculiarities of Gastronomic Tourism and Potential to Growth in Uzbekistan"* underlines the structural and promotional gaps in the country's food tourism framework[5].

A noteworthy study by Tajibayeva and Roziqova on ResearchGate discusses the integration of gastronomic tourism with ecotourism. They propose a combined development model, especially beneficial in rural regions, where culinary heritage and organic food production could be synchronized for sustainable community development. From a strategic perspective, Patterson and Turaev, in their Google Scholar-indexed paper *"Gastronomy Tourism as an Emerging Niche Market in Uzbekistan"*, advocate for positioning Uzbek cuisine within the broader Silk Road tourism concept[6]. They emphasize storytelling, branding, and chef diplomacy as tools for international recognition.

In another relevant contribution, A. Mahmudov explores how culinary traditions contribute to patriotic education among youth in Uzbekistan. He recommends integrating food heritage into school curricula and public campaigns to strengthen cultural continuity. Despite these valuable insights, a unified and data-driven management system for culinary heritage remains underdeveloped. Current research underscores the necessity for

institutional coordination, marketing innovation, professional training, and digital platforms to effectively promote and preserve Uzbekistan's rich gastronomic legacy[7].

2. Materials and Methods

This research adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in a case-based and context-sensitive approach to investigate the current state and management strategies of culinary heritage in Uzbekistan. The study primarily relies on a combination of document analysis, expert interviews, and field observations to construct a comprehensive understanding of how culinary traditions are preserved, managed, and promoted at the national level. Government documents—including strategic plans issued by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan, official decrees, and development programs—were analyzed to identify policy objectives, institutional responsibilities, and regulatory frameworks related to culinary heritage. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders, including local tourism officials, professional chefs, food historians, and representatives from the Association of Uzbek Chefs, to gain insights into operational challenges and promotional efforts. These interviews explored key themes such as infrastructure development, gastronomic branding, culinary education, and digital marketing. In addition, observational data was collected during major cultural events such as the “Asrlar Sadosi” Festival and “Uzbek Gastronomy Week,” where the promotion of national cuisine is prominently featured. These events served as a lens through which the interaction between tradition and commercialization could be evaluated. The research also incorporates comparative insights by briefly examining successful culinary heritage systems in other countries, such as Turkey and South Korea, to identify transferrable models applicable to Uzbekistan's socio-cultural and economic context[8]. Data triangulation was employed to validate findings across different sources and ensure reliability. By focusing on institutional mechanisms, cultural narratives, and stakeholder engagement, the methodology aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the systemic enablers and barriers to effective culinary heritage management and promotion in Uzbekistan.

3. Results

The results of this study reveal that Uzbekistan has made important, though uneven, strides in preserving and promoting its culinary heritage. Government policies and strategic documents indicate that national cuisine is increasingly recognized as a component of tourism and cultural diplomacy, especially since the adoption of the 2022–2026 National Tourism Development Strategy[9]. Initiatives such as “Gastro Bazar,” “Asrlar Sadosi,” and “Uzbekistan Gastronomy Week” serve as public platforms to showcase traditional dishes and regional food identities[10]. However, these events remain largely ad hoc and lack systematic coordination. Interviews with chefs, tourism officials, and cultural experts highlighted that promotional activities are mostly concentrated in festival formats and on social media, often driven by individual or private sector initiatives rather than by a comprehensive state-led framework. Furthermore, institutional mechanisms such as culinary education, professional chef certification, and national standards for traditional recipes are underdeveloped. For instance, Uzbekistan does not currently have an internationally recognized system of accreditation for chefs or gastronomic professionals, limiting the global competitiveness and formal recognition of the country's culinary experts. This structural gap, according to respondents, contributes to the fragmentation of efforts and the missed opportunity to create a unified national gastronomic brand.

Additionally, the study found that the international visibility of Uzbekistan's culinary heritage remains limited, despite considerable domestic enthusiasm and a rich gastronomic tradition. While Uzbekistan's national dish—plov—has been successfully inscribed in UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, other iconic foods and culinary

practices have not yet received similar international recognition. There is also a significant lack of structured gastronomic tourism infrastructure, such as certified gastro-tours, designated culinary trails, and curated tourist packages centered around regional cuisines. Field observations and interview data suggest that rural producers and artisans—who often preserve the most authentic culinary traditions—are seldom integrated into tourism value chains. Despite strong potential, traditional food producers in rural areas lack the institutional support needed to participate in the promotion of culinary heritage. Participants also emphasized the need for integrating digital platforms, educational content, and cross-sectoral coordination to move beyond symbolic events and build a sustainable model for culinary heritage management[11]. In summary, while Uzbekistan possesses rich gastronomic resources and cultural momentum, the absence of a formalized and strategically managed system prevents the country from fully capitalizing on its culinary heritage for tourism, diplomacy, and national branding purposes.

4. Discussion

The analysis reveals that Uzbekistan possesses a vibrant and deeply rooted culinary tradition that holds considerable cultural and symbolic value. However, the promotion and institutionalization of this heritage have been constrained by structural fragmentation and the lack of a unified management system. Although national initiatives such as the “Asrlar Sadosi” cultural festival and social media-driven campaigns have helped to spotlight traditional Uzbek dishes, these efforts have largely remained isolated and episodic[12]. The absence of a national gastronomic strategy, standardized culinary education, and recognized certification frameworks undermines the professionalization and international positioning of Uzbekistan’s culinary sector. As interviews with chefs and tourism experts suggest, there is a growing awareness of the value of culinary heritage, yet most actors operate independently, lacking coordination with government agencies or tourism platforms. The state’s role has primarily been reactive—supporting events and symbolic projects—rather than proactively establishing a regulatory or institutional infrastructure to guide sustainable development in this field.

When viewed in a comparative international context, Uzbekistan’s experience reflects both opportunities and shortcomings. Countries such as South Korea and Turkey have demonstrated how culinary heritage, when strategically managed, can become a cornerstone of soft power and economic growth. South Korea’s government, for example, institutionalized the “K-Food” brand under the Korean Wave (Hallyu) initiative, combining state support with private sector innovation. Similarly, Turkey has developed gastro-tourism routes in cities like Gaziantep and Hatay, both of which are recognized by UNESCO for their culinary significance. In contrast, Uzbekistan has yet to capitalize on its inclusion in the Silk Road cultural corridor to build a competitive gastronomic brand. While dishes like plov have achieved UNESCO recognition, the broader food culture—including bread-making rituals, fermentation techniques, regional desserts, and seasonal food customs—remains underdocumented and underpromoted[13-14]. The lack of interdisciplinary research on Uzbekistan’s food heritage, combined with limited cross-ministerial coordination, has hindered the development of a strategic culinary ecosystem that connects agriculture, tourism, education, and heritage policy in a coherent framework.

Beyond its cultural and diplomatic dimensions, culinary heritage in Uzbekistan holds untapped potential as a driver of inclusive economic development, especially in rural regions. The current study underscores the need to integrate local farmers, women entrepreneurs, artisanal producers, and small-scale food businesses into the gastronomic value chain. For instance, promoting regional specialties such as Andijan noni, Khorezmian shivit oshi, or Samarkand somsa through gastro-tourism packages could stimulate local economies and contribute to rural livelihoods. Yet, existing tourism development plans seldom include clear components for culinary engagement or rural supply chain integration. Moreover, the digital infrastructure required for promoting

Uzbek cuisine globally—such as multilingual recipe platforms, interactive culinary maps, or virtual food experiences—remains limited[15]. Without systemic investment and cross-sectoral planning, Uzbekistan’s culinary heritage risks being confined to folkloric displays rather than evolving into a dynamic sector with export potential and sustainable impact. Thus, this discussion affirms that a more ambitious, integrated, and innovation-driven approach is needed to transform Uzbekistan’s culinary legacy into a competitive and culturally enriching national asset.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study affirms that Uzbekistan’s culinary heritage represents not only a profound expression of cultural identity but also an underutilized resource with immense potential for economic development, tourism growth, and international cultural diplomacy. While national dishes such as plov, somsa, and shivit oshi continue to symbolize Uzbek hospitality and tradition, the systems that govern their preservation and promotion remain fragmented and largely event-driven. The absence of a unified strategic framework, insufficient professional training infrastructure, and limited digital presence hinder the effective institutionalization of culinary heritage. Furthermore, the disconnect between urban-based promotional efforts and rural culinary practices reduces opportunities for inclusive development and local empowerment. The research underscores the need for a shift from sporadic, symbolic initiatives to a comprehensive, policy-backed ecosystem that integrates heritage preservation, tourism planning, education, digital innovation, and cross-sectoral collaboration. If properly managed, Uzbekistan’s culinary heritage could become a central pillar of its national branding, support sustainable rural livelihoods, and contribute meaningfully to its cultural presence on the global stage. Therefore, it is essential that the country builds a modern, coordinated, and forward-looking management system that not only honors the richness of its past but also channels it into concrete socio-economic benefits for its future.

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