



PRESERVING UZBEKISTAN'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH THE FERGANA VALLEY SCHOOLS OF ASKIYA: A SOCIO- PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Zuhra Saminjon kizi Kimsanboyeva

Doctoral Researcher, Namangan State Technical University

E-mail: zuhrakimsanboyeva@gmail.com

Tel.: +998 91 369-08-21

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 25th July 2026

Accepted: 27th July 2026

Online: 29th July 2026

KEYWORDS

Askiya, Qiziqchilik, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Fergana Valley, Social Philosophy, Cultural Identity, Oral Tradition, Master–Apprentice Tradition, Digital Heritage, Globalization

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the historical development and contemporary transformation of the Fergana Valley schools of askiya and qiziqchilik through socio-philosophical and cultural approaches. Particular attention is devoted to the regional traditions of Kokand, Margilan, Andijan, and Namangan, each of which has contributed distinctive stylistic, linguistic, and aesthetic characteristics to the evolution of Uzbek verbal art. The research argues that these regional schools function not merely as artistic communities but also as mechanisms for preserving cultural identity, strengthening social cohesion, and transmitting ethical values through the master–apprentice tradition.

The paper further examines the impact of globalization and digital technologies on the transformation of traditional performance practices. While digital media have significantly expanded opportunities for documenting, preserving, and disseminating askiya worldwide, they have simultaneously introduced challenges associated with commercialization, simplification of artistic expression, and the erosion of authentic performance practices. Drawing upon UNESCO's concept of intangible cultural heritage and contemporary theories of cultural identity and hybridization, the study demonstrates that the sustainability of askiya depends upon maintaining a dynamic balance between innovation and tradition.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has been characterized by unprecedented processes of globalization, digital transformation, and intercultural communication. While these developments have facilitated the exchange of knowledge and cultural practices across national boundaries, they have also intensified concerns regarding the preservation of local cultural identities and traditional knowledge systems. Consequently, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage has become one of the principal objectives of international cultural policy,

particularly following the adoption of UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003.

Uzbekistan occupies a distinguished place among the civilizations of Central Asia owing to its exceptionally rich oral traditions, performing arts, literary heritage, and customary practices. Among the most remarkable manifestations of this cultural wealth are *askiya* and *qiziqchilik*, two sophisticated forms of oral performance that have evolved over centuries while preserving their essential artistic and educational functions. These traditions represent far more than forms of entertainment; they embody the intellectual creativity, ethical principles, communicative competence, and collective worldview of the Uzbek people.

Particularly significant within this cultural landscape are the regional schools of the Fergana Valley, where *askiya* achieved its highest level of artistic refinement. Historical evidence indicates that the traditions of Kokand, Margilan, Andijan, and Namangan collectively established a distinctive cultural environment in which rhetorical excellence, improvisational mastery, and philosophical wit were continuously cultivated and transmitted across generations. The geographical location of the Fergana Valley, its economic prosperity, multicultural composition, and vibrant commercial networks created favorable conditions for the emergence of unique regional styles that continue to shape contemporary Uzbek oral performance.

From the perspective of social philosophy, *askiya* should be interpreted as an institution of public dialogue rather than merely a folkloric genre. Through verbal competition, satire, irony, and improvisation, performers articulate moral norms, criticize social shortcomings, reinforce collective values, and encourage critical reflection without resorting to hostility or violence. Consequently, *askiya* contributes to the development of democratic communication, social solidarity, and cultural continuity.

Despite its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014, relatively limited international scholarship has examined *askiya* from interdisciplinary perspectives integrating cultural studies, social philosophy, and heritage management. Existing studies predominantly focus on folklore, linguistics, or literary criticism, leaving considerable scope for broader socio-cultural analysis.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the socio-philosophical significance of the Fergana Valley schools of *askiya* and *qiziqchilik* as mechanisms for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage under contemporary conditions of globalization. It further explores how traditional systems of cultural transmission may be harmonized with digital innovation while preserving their authenticity and social functions.

The Fergana Valley has historically been recognized as one of the most fertile and culturally dynamic regions of Central Asia. Owing to its favorable geographical position, abundant water resources, productive agricultural lands, and strategic location along historical trade routes, the valley became an important center of economic prosperity and cultural interaction. These conditions provided a favorable environment for the emergence and continuous development of sophisticated forms of oral and performing arts.

Historical evidence suggests that the institutional formation of the Fergana Valley schools of *askiya* began during the sixteenth century and reached its highest level of artistic development during the period of the Kokand Khanate (1709–1876). The royal court of

Kokand functioned not only as a political center but also as a prominent cultural institution where poets, musicians, storytellers, and masters of verbal improvisation regularly participated in literary gatherings and artistic competitions. Such intellectual environments significantly contributed to the refinement of rhetorical performance and the establishment of professional traditions of *askiya*.

Unlike many other forms of folk entertainment, *askiya* in the Fergana Valley gradually evolved into a highly sophisticated verbal art characterized by logical reasoning, linguistic creativity, rapid improvisation, and philosophical wit. The cultural diversity of the region, where Uzbek, Tajik, Uyghur, and other ethnic communities coexisted for centuries, enriched the vocabulary, imagery, and thematic diversity of *askiya*. Similarly, the active commercial life associated with caravan trade introduced new social experiences and professional terminology that expanded the artistic repertoire of performers.

Moreover, the development of irrigation systems and densely populated rural communities created numerous public spaces where collective performances became an integral element of social life. Weddings, seasonal celebrations, public festivals, and traditional gatherings provided opportunities for performers to engage directly with audiences, thereby strengthening both artistic excellence and community participation.

Consequently, the Fergana Valley became not merely a geographical region associated with *askiya*, but the principal cultural environment in which its artistic standards, pedagogical traditions, and ethical norms were systematically developed and transmitted across generations.

Although united by common artistic principles, the regional schools of the Fergana Valley gradually developed distinctive stylistic identities.

The Kokand School is widely regarded as the oldest and most academically refined tradition. Owing to Kokand's historical status as the capital of the Kokand Khanate, its performers were strongly influenced by classical court culture and the literary heritage of classical Uzbek poetry. Performers were expected not only to demonstrate intellectual superiority but also to display mastery of poetic language, musical intonation, rhetorical elegance, and refined literary expression. Classical Arabic and Persian literary traditions significantly enriched the vocabulary and stylistic sophistication of this school.

The Margilan School, historically associated with silk production and traditional craftsmanship, is distinguished by its artistic delicacy and elaborate metaphorical language. Performers frequently employ historical references, images derived from handicrafts, textile production, and local cultural symbolism. Their improvisations demonstrate exceptional aesthetic refinement and rich figurative expression.

The Andijan School represents perhaps the most democratic form of *askiya*. Owing to Andijan's historical role as an important commercial center, performers traditionally addressed a broad social audience using accessible language, contemporary social themes, and observations drawn from everyday life. Humor, practical wisdom, and concise conclusions characterize the rhetorical style of this school.

The Namangan School reflects the agricultural landscape of one of Uzbekistan's most fertile regions. Its performers are renowned for sophisticated metaphors inspired by gardens, seasonal changes, agricultural labor, and natural imagery. One of the distinctive

characteristics of this tradition is the so-called "extended askiya", an improvisational technique in which participants sustain a single thematic discussion through a sequence of increasingly complex verbal exchanges, demonstrating remarkable logical consistency and linguistic creativity.

Rather than functioning as isolated artistic traditions, these four regional schools have continuously interacted through festivals, weddings, cultural gatherings, and public competitions. Such exchanges encouraged both healthy artistic rivalry and mutual enrichment, ultimately contributing to the emergence of a unified yet internally diverse tradition of Uzbek *askiya*.

One of the fundamental factors underlying the sustainability of *askiya* and *qiziqchilik* is the traditional master-apprentice (*ustoz-shogird*) system, which has ensured the intergenerational transmission of artistic knowledge, ethical principles, and performance techniques for centuries. Unlike formal educational institutions, this indigenous pedagogical model emphasizes direct observation, continuous practice, and moral guidance within an interpersonal learning environment.

In the Fergana Valley, apprenticeship extends far beyond the acquisition of rhetorical skills. Young performers are expected to internalize cultural etiquette, linguistic sensitivity, historical awareness, and philosophical reflection. The process of becoming an accomplished *askiya* performer therefore requires not only exceptional verbal ability but also intellectual maturity, emotional discipline, and profound respect for cultural traditions.

Historically, renowned masters of the Fergana Valley established distinctive artistic schools whose influence extended across generations. Among the most influential performers of the twentieth century was Tursunboy Askarov, whose artistic philosophy was founded upon the principle of "profound meaning expressed through subtle humor." His improvisational method encouraged performers to avoid immediate verbal attack and instead construct carefully reasoned responses culminating in intellectually sophisticated humor. This approach, commonly referred to as the "school of reflective askiya," significantly enriched the philosophical dimension of Uzbek oral performance.

Equally significant was the contribution of Yusufjon Qiziq Shakarjonov (1869–1959), one of the pioneers of modern Uzbek *qiziqchilik*. By integrating theatrical techniques, facial expression, pantomime, vocal modulation, and stage performance into traditional comic art, he expanded the aesthetic possibilities of Uzbek humorous theatre. His innovations transformed *qiziqchilik* from a purely verbal performance into a multidimensional theatrical experience while preserving its traditional ethical foundations.

Today, many distinguished performers in the Fergana Valley continue this pedagogical lineage. Contemporary masters successfully combine fidelity to traditional artistic principles with responsiveness to modern audiences, thereby ensuring both continuity and creative innovation within Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage.

Globalization should be understood not merely as an economic phenomenon but also as a complex process of cultural transformation. Contemporary scholarship identifies two simultaneous tendencies within cultural globalization. The first involves cultural homogenization, whereby standardized global cultural practices gradually diminish local

distinctiveness. The second reflects a countervailing movement toward the revitalization of local identities and the preservation of indigenous cultural traditions.

The contemporary development of Uzbek *askiya* illustrates the interaction of these two processes. Digital technologies and online communication have created unprecedented opportunities for documenting, preserving, and disseminating traditional performances to international audiences. Today, recordings of *askiya* performances are widely accessible through digital platforms, enabling millions of viewers to engage with this unique element of Uzbek cultural heritage.

However, increased visibility also introduces significant challenges. Commercialization, simplified language, shortened performance formats, and adaptation to entertainment-oriented media may gradually reduce the philosophical depth and rhetorical sophistication that historically distinguished *askiya*. Consequently, safeguarding artistic authenticity has become one of the central challenges confronting cultural institutions and performers.

Nevertheless, digital transformation should not be interpreted exclusively as a source of cultural risk. On the contrary, digital technologies provide innovative mechanisms for cultural preservation through electronic archives, virtual museums, multimedia documentation, digital catalogues, artificial intelligence-assisted linguistic analysis, and online educational resources. These technologies substantially enhance opportunities for scholarly research while ensuring broader public access to traditional knowledge.

This dynamic relationship between continuity and innovation corresponds closely to the concept of hybrid cultures developed by Néstor García Canclini, who argues that contemporary cultural identities emerge through continuous interaction between inherited traditions and modern cultural practices. From this perspective, the contemporary *askiya* performer simultaneously embodies the roles of cultural guardian and creative innovator. Rather than replacing tradition, technological modernization can reinforce cultural sustainability when guided by appropriate institutional policies.

From a socio-philosophical perspective, the Fergana Valley schools of *askiya* and *qiziqchilik* should be regarded not merely as regional artistic traditions but as institutions of cultural communication and civic education.

Their significance extends beyond artistic expression in several important respects.

First, they preserve collective cultural memory by transmitting historical experience, moral narratives, and linguistic traditions across generations.

Second, they strengthen cultural identity by reinforcing attachment to the Uzbek language, national values, and shared historical consciousness.

Third, they cultivate democratic dialogue by promoting intellectual debate, respectful disagreement, and non-violent communication based upon rhetorical competence rather than coercion.

Fourth, they encourage critical thinking through improvisation, analytical reasoning, and creative problem-solving, competencies that remain essential for contemporary democratic societies.

Finally, they contribute to social cohesion by creating inclusive public spaces where cultural participation transcends differences in age, occupation, and social status. In this

respect, *askiya* functions not only as a performing art but also as a mechanism for strengthening social solidarity and promoting civic responsibility.

Accordingly, the preservation of the Fergana Valley schools should be considered an integral component of Uzbekistan's broader strategy for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and advancing sustainable cultural development within the context of globalization.

The principal contribution of this research lies in reconceptualizing the Fergana Valley schools of *askiya* and *qiziqchilik* as socio-philosophical institutions rather than solely as regional folklore traditions. This interdisciplinary perspective demonstrates that these artistic practices simultaneously preserve cultural identity, promote democratic communication, strengthen social cohesion, and facilitate the sustainable transmission of intangible cultural heritage. Such an approach expands existing scholarship by integrating folklore studies with social philosophy, cultural policy, and heritage management, thereby offering a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the contemporary significance of Uzbek traditional performing arts.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the Fergana Valley schools of *askiya* and *qiziqchilik* represent far more than regional forms of folk entertainment. They constitute sophisticated socio-cultural institutions that have played a pivotal role in preserving Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage, strengthening national identity, and fostering ethical communication for several centuries. Their historical development reflects the close interaction between geographical conditions, economic prosperity, multicultural coexistence, and intellectual creativity that has characterized the Fergana Valley throughout its history.

The comparative analysis of the Kokand, Margilan, Andijan, and Namangan schools reveals that each tradition has developed distinctive linguistic, stylistic, and aesthetic features while simultaneously contributing to a unified national system of oral performance. Their continued interaction through artistic competitions, public festivals, and the master-apprentice tradition has ensured both cultural continuity and creative innovation. This dynamic relationship illustrates that cultural diversity within a shared national framework constitutes one of the principal strengths of Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage.

From a socio-philosophical perspective, *askiya* performs several important social functions beyond artistic expression. It promotes critical and analytical thinking, cultivates rhetorical competence, reinforces ethical values, strengthens civic dialogue, and contributes to social cohesion through non-confrontational communication. Consequently, *askiya* should be understood not only as an artistic genre but also as an educational and cultural institution that facilitates the formation of responsible citizenship and democratic communicative practices.

The study further indicates that globalization presents both opportunities and challenges for the future of *askiya* and *qiziqchilik*. Digital technologies have significantly expanded possibilities for documentation, preservation, academic research, and international dissemination. However, increasing commercialization, simplified performance formats, and the influence of mass media may threaten the authenticity and artistic complexity of these traditions. Therefore, sustainable preservation requires carefully balanced cultural policies

that combine technological innovation with rigorous protection of traditional artistic principles.

In this context, the long-term sustainability of the Fergana Valley schools depends upon several strategic priorities: strengthening the master-apprentice system, integrating intangible cultural heritage into educational curricula, establishing comprehensive digital archives and audiovisual repositories, encouraging interdisciplinary academic research, expanding international cultural cooperation, and promoting high-quality digital content that accurately represents traditional performance practices. Such measures will ensure that *askiya* and *qiziqchilik* continue to function as living cultural traditions rather than static historical artifacts.

Ultimately, this research argues that the Fergana Valley schools of *askiya* and *qiziqchilik* should be recognized as dynamic socio-philosophical institutions that preserve cultural memory, promote intercultural dialogue, and contribute to sustainable cultural development. Their continued vitality demonstrates that intangible cultural heritage remains an indispensable resource for strengthening cultural resilience, enriching global cultural diversity, and fostering mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

References:

- 1.Assmann, Jan. (2011). Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination. Cambridge University Press.
- 2.Bauman, Richard. (1977). Verbal Art as Performance. Waveland Press.
- 3.Bourdieu, Pierre. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- 4.Canclini, Néstor García. (1995). Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity. University of Minnesota Press.
- 5.Hall, Stuart. (1996). Who Needs Identity? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), Questions of Cultural Identity (pp. 1–17). Sage Publications.
- 6.Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. (2004). Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production. Museum International, 56(1–2), 52–65.
- 7.Kurin, Richard. (2004). Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: A Critical Appraisal. Museum International, 56(1–2), 66–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00459.x>
- 8.UNESCO. (2003). Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: UNESCO.
- 9.UNESCO. (2014). Askiya, the Art of Wit. Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
- 10.Vosifiy, Zayniddin. (1961). Badoye' ul-vaqoye'. Tashkent: Fan.
- 11.Navoiy, Alisher. (2011). Mukammal asarlar to'plami (20 jild). Tashkent: Fan.
- 12.Bobur, Zahiriddin Muhammad. (2002). Boburnoma. Tashkent: Sharq.
- 13.Xondamir. (1993). Makorim ul-axloq. Tashkent: Meros.
- 14.O'zbekiston Respublikasi Madaniyat vazirligi. (2022). O'zbekiston Respublikasi nomoddiy madaniy merosi milliy ro'yxati. Tashkent.
- 15.UNESCO. (2024). Periodic Report on the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2020–2024 cycle): Uzbekistan.

