

State Management of the Conservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage Values in the Current Context of Digital Transformation

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes state management in the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage values in the current context of digital transformation. Based on an interdisciplinary approach combining cultural management, public management, and digital transformation studies, the article clarifies the theoretical basis of safeguarding, value promotion, and the role of the State in institution building, data governance, authenticity assurance, and community participation. The analysis shows that Vietnam has a rich heritage system, including more than 40,000 relics, nearly 70,000 inventoried intangible cultural heritage elements, 620 national intangible cultural heritage elements, 294 national treasures, and 37 heritage items inscribed by UNESCO. This scale creates an urgent need for digitization, data interconnection, and renewal of management methods. The article identifies key issues such as fragmented data, lack of technical standards, limited digital human resources, risks of value distortion, and unclear community data rights. On that basis, it proposes groups of solutions concerning institutional improvement, development of a unified database, digital heritage human resources, authenticity assurance, community rights, and the connection of safeguarding with education, sustainable tourism, and cultural industries.

KEYWORDS - state management; cultural heritage; heritage safeguarding; heritage value promotion; digital transformation

I. Introduction

Cultural heritage is a crucial component of national identity, reflecting historical depth, collective memory, value systems, knowledge, and the creative capacity of the Vietnamese people across generations. In national development, cultural heritage is not merely a legacy of the past but also an endogenous resource for traditional education, human development, tourism, cultural industries, and the enhancement of national position. Therefore, state management of the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage values is a strategic task in cultural development policy.

At present, digital transformation is exerting profound impacts on all areas of social life, including culture and cultural heritage. Digital technologies make it possible to document, store, reconstruct, communicate, and exploit heritage in new ways, such as digital databases, digital heritage maps, digital museums, 3D models, virtual reality, augmented reality, QR-code interpretation, digital learning materials, and multi-platform communication. Thanks to these tools, heritage can reach a wider public, especially younger generations and international audiences.

However, digital transformation also creates new issues for state management. If activities stop at photographing, scanning documents, recording videos, or placing information online, heritage digitization may become merely formal and lack governance depth. In addition, heritage data may be fragmented, insufficiently

standardized, and difficult to interconnect; heritage images and symbols may be copied, edited, commercialized, or interpreted inaccurately; and bearer communities may become only sources of information rather than full participants in decisions about how their heritage is digitized and used.

In response to these issues, this article pursues three objectives. First, it systematizes the theoretical basis of state management of the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage values in the context of digital transformation. Second, it analyzes the current situation, opportunities, and issues in cultural heritage management in Vietnam based on official policies and data. Third, it proposes groups of solutions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of state management, ensuring that cultural heritage is both safeguarded in terms of its original values and promoted through digital technologies, sustainable development, and community-centered governance.

II. Theoretical Framework

According to UNESCO's 2003 Convention, intangible cultural heritage includes practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as part of their heritage; these elements are constantly recreated in relation to the environment, history, and a sense of identity [1]. This approach shows that cultural heritage is not simply what remains from the past; rather, it is a living entity practiced, transmitted, recreated, and enriched by communities in contemporary life.

From the perspective of state management, safeguarding cultural heritage is the process by which the State uses legal instruments, policies, planning, administrative apparatuses, financial resources, professional human resources, and monitoring mechanisms to identify, preserve, restore, protect, and maintain the core values of heritage. Safeguarding does not mean freezing heritage; rather, it means protecting the elements that constitute identity, authenticity, and the capacity of heritage to continue existing in a changing social environment.

Promoting the value of cultural heritage is the process of enabling heritage to continue to have meaning in contemporary life. Heritage can be promoted through education, communication, scientific research, cultural tourism, cultural diplomacy, cultural industries, and community development. However, promotion should not be understood as exploiting heritage at any cost. Without management, heritage may be reduced to a performance product, a tourism commodity, or media content detached from its original cultural context.

Digital transformation in cultural heritage refers to the application of digital technologies to change the methods of management, safeguarding, storage, exploitation, communication, and sharing of heritage values. Unlike simple digitization, digital transformation requires changes in management thinking, operational processes, data structures, coordination mechanisms, and public-service models. Thus, digitization is a necessary condition, while digital transformation is an overall governance process based on data, digital platforms, and the participation of multiple actors.

In cultural heritage management in the digital era, the State plays the role of institution builder, standard setter, resource coordinator, guarantor of authenticity, protector of community interests, and controller of risks in heritage exploitation. The community is the subject that holds, practices, and transmits heritage; scholars provide professional foundations; technology enterprises and cultural-tourism businesses develop platforms, products, and services; and the public receives, interacts with, and co-creates values. Coordination among these actors determines the sustainability of heritage safeguarding and promotion.

Table 1. Selected Contents of State Management of Cultural Heritage in the Context of Digital Transformation

Management content	Traditional management requirement	Requirement in the context of digital transformation
Institutions and policies	Issuing regulations on inventorying, ranking, safeguarding, restoration, and promotion of heritage	Adding regulations on heritage data, digitization standards, access rights, copyright, and information security
Inventory and dossiers	Collecting documents, preparing paper-based dossiers, and storing them in professional agencies	Developing digital dossiers, interconnected databases, regular updates, and shareable information
Safeguarding original values	Protecting relics, objects, cultural spaces, artisans, and heritage practices	Protecting original objects, digital copies, primary data, interpretive context, and authenticity at the same time
Value promotion	Exhibitions, festivals, communication, education, and tourism in physical spaces	Digital museums, digital maps, digital learning materials, VR/AR experiences, smart interpretation, and multi-platform communication
Monitoring and evaluation	Inspection, supervision, and periodic reports	Data-based monitoring, access analytics, risk warnings, digital-impact assessment, and public feedback

Source: Compiled by the author.

III. Current State of State Management in the Conservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage Values in the Context of Digital Transformation

3.1. The Legal and Policy Framework Has Been Increasingly Improved

In recent years, Vietnam’s legal and policy framework for cultural heritage has continued to be improved. The Law on Cultural Heritage No. 45/2024/QH15 was adopted by the National Assembly on November 23, 2024 and came into effect on July 1, 2025, creating a new legal basis for managing, safeguarding, and promoting heritage values under current development conditions [2]. The Law helps address several shortcomings of the previous period and expands mechanisms for resource mobilization, decentralization, and harmonization between heritage preservation and socio-economic development.

In terms of digital transformation, Decision No. 749/QD-TTg on the National Digital Transformation Program to 2025, with orientations to 2030, provides a general framework for the development of digital government, digital economy, and digital society [3]. Specifically for heritage, Decision No. 2026/QD-TTg approving the Program for the Digitization of Vietnamese Cultural Heritage for the period 2021-2030 requires the development of a national cultural heritage database on a unified digital technology platform to serve storage, management, research, safeguarding, exploitation, communication, and sustainable tourism development [4].

In addition, Decision No. 1230/QD-TTg on the Program for the Sustainable Safeguarding and Promotion of Vietnamese Cultural Heritage Values for the period 2021-2025 emphasizes safeguarding heritage in connection with sustainable development [5]. In 2025, Decree No. 215/2025/ND-CP further specified measures for managing, safeguarding, and promoting world cultural and natural heritage, underwater cultural heritage, and intangible cultural heritage on UNESCO lists and the National List, while also regulating policies for artisans and intangible cultural heritage bearers [6]. This provides an important foundation for the State to renew heritage management methods in the digital context.

Table 2. Selected Objectives of the Program for the Digitization of Vietnamese Cultural Heritage for the Period 2021-2030

Target by 2030	Policy content
UNESCO-inscribed heritage and special national relics	100% of tangible, intangible, and documentary heritage inscribed by UNESCO and 100% of special national relics to be digitized and applied on digital platforms
National treasures and national intangible heritage	100% of national treasures and heritage elements in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage to be digitized and applied on digital platforms
Professional human resources	100% of professionals working in the cultural heritage sector to receive training, retraining, and updated knowledge and skills in digital transformation
Data and platforms	Developing a national database on cultural heritage on a unified digital technology platform to serve storage, management, research, safeguarding, exploitation, communication, and sustainable tourism

Source: Compiled from Decision No. 2026/QD-TTg [4].

3.2. The Large Scale of Heritage Requires Urgent Datafication

Vietnam possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage system, distributed widely across the country and closely associated with community life. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, by 2024 Vietnam had more than 40,000 relics, nearly 70,000 inventoried intangible cultural heritage elements, 138 special national relics, 3,653 national relics, 620 national intangible cultural heritage elements, 294 national treasures or groups of treasures, and 202 museums preserving and displaying more than 4 million documents and objects [7]. By December 2025, Vietnam had 37 heritage items inscribed on UNESCO lists, including 09 cultural and natural world heritage sites, 17 intangible cultural heritage elements, and 11 documentary heritage items [8].

Table 3. Selected Official Data on Cultural Heritage in Vietnam

Indicator	Data/update	Source
Inventoried relics nationwide	More than 40,000 relics	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024
Inventoried intangible cultural heritage elements	Nearly 70,000 elements	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024

Special national relics	138 relics	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024
National relics	3,653 relics	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024
National intangible cultural heritage elements	620 elements	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024
National treasures	294 objects/groups of objects	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024
Museums	202 museums preserving and displaying more than 4 million documents and objects	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024
Heritage inscribed by UNESCO	37 heritage items, including 09 cultural and natural world heritage sites, 17 intangible cultural heritage elements, and 11 documentary heritage items	Department of Cultural Heritage, 2025

Source: Compiled from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism [7] and the Department of Cultural Heritage [8].

These figures show that managing heritage through traditional administrative methods alone is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of updating, monitoring, interconnecting, and exploiting information. Since heritage is distributed across many localities, involves many communities, encompasses many types, and falls under multiple levels of management, building unified digital data has become an important condition for improving the effectiveness of state management. Datafication not only supports statistics and storage but also risk warnings, conservation planning, tourism-impact assessment, research, education, and communication.

3.3. Initial Achievements

Several positive results can be identified in three aspects. First, awareness of digital transformation in the heritage sector has improved. Many management agencies, museums, monument management boards, and localities have viewed digitization as a necessary task, not only for communication but also for storage, management, research, and education. Second, many activities for digitizing documents, objects, relics, and intangible heritage have been implemented through audio recording, video recording, digital dossier preparation, QR-code interpretation, online exhibitions, smart-tour applications, 3D digitization, and multi-platform communication.

Third, digital transformation has helped expand public access to heritage. As the public becomes increasingly familiar with digital environments, products such as digital museums, digital lessons, documentary videos, online exhibitions, digital maps, and short-form media content can bring heritage closer to pupils, students, tourists, and international audiences. This provides a basis for heritage to become a resource for education, tourism, and cultural industries in the new context.

3.4. Limitations and Issues

Despite these achievements, state management of the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage values in the context of digital transformation still faces many limitations. First is fragmented, insufficiently standardized, and poorly interconnected data. Many units have conducted digitization, but data formats, descriptive criteria, storage methods, and updating mechanisms are not yet unified. As a result, data exist but are difficult to share, and digital products are difficult to integrate into a common system.

Second, some digitization activities remain formal. Scanning documents, photographing objects, recording videos, or posting information on websites is necessary but not enough to create substantive digital transformation. Without data standards, verification mechanisms, access authorization, updating plans, and long-term use strategies, digital data may become fragmented archives with limited value for management, research, and heritage promotion.

Third, digital heritage human resources remain limited. Heritage management in a digital environment requires personnel who understand culture, history, law, communities, and heritage authenticity, while also having skills in data, technology, digital communication, information security, and platform governance. The shortage of interdisciplinary human resources means that many digital products lack depth, fail to fully reflect cultural context, and are not sustainable in operation.

Fourth, data rights, intellectual property rights, and the rights of bearer communities have not been fully resolved. In a digital environment, heritage images, sounds, symbols, traditional knowledge, and stories can be

copied, edited, and disseminated rapidly. Without mechanisms for consultation, consent, benefit sharing, and the protection of sensitive data, digital transformation may lead to unfair exploitation and may even damage community trust in management agencies.

Table 4. Selected Issues in Cultural Heritage Management under Digital Transformation

Issue	Main manifestations	Impact on state management
Fragmented data	Each locality, museum, or monument management board stores data in its own way	Difficult to interconnect, aggregate, and develop a shared database
Formal digitization	Mainly photographing, scanning, video recording, and posting brief information	Data are difficult to reuse, have limited governance value, and lack updating capacity
Lack of digital human resources	Heritage officers lack data skills; technology staff lack cultural knowledge	Digital products may lack professional depth and authenticity
Risk of value distortion	Editing, inaccurate performance, commercialization, and detaching heritage from its original context	Reducing authenticity, causing misunderstanding, and weakening public trust
Unclear data rights	Unclear access, exploitation, sharing, and benefit-sharing rights	Potential disputes, unfair exploitation, and insufficient community empowerment

Source: Compiled by the author.

IV. Orientations and Groups of Solutions

4.1. Improving the Institutional Framework for Cultural Heritage Management in the Digital Environment

First, it is necessary to continue concretizing the 2024 Law on Cultural Heritage and related documents by fully incorporating regulations on heritage data, digital dossiers, digital replicas, digitization standards, access authorization, data protection, intellectual property rights, community cultural rights, and stakeholder responsibilities in the digital environment. This is a condition for preventing digital transformation in the heritage sector from becoming spontaneous, fragmented, or limited to short-term projects.

Second, technical standards and regulations for cultural heritage digitization should be issued. These standards should include data formats, metadata structures, image, sound, video, and 3D-model quality, verification procedures, data classification principles, and long-term storage requirements. For intangible heritage, digitization standards must record the practice context, heritage bearers, cultural space, transmission process, and symbolic meanings, not merely the final performance product.

Third, a professional appraisal mechanism should be established for digital heritage products. Products such as virtual museums, 3D reconstructions, documentary films, digital learning materials, tourism applications, or games inspired by heritage need the participation of management agencies, scholars, and bearer communities. Appraisal is not intended to obstruct creativity but to ensure that creativity is based on proper understanding and respect for original values.

4.2. Developing a Unified and Interconnected Cultural Heritage Database

First, the development of a national cultural heritage database should be accelerated in a unified, controlled-open, and interoperable direction. This database should serve multiple objectives simultaneously: state management, scientific research, education, communication, tourism development, cultural industries, and international cooperation.

Second, data quality should be prioritized over data quantity. A valuable digital heritage dossier should include not only the name, location, and images, but also information on history, bearers, context, conservation status, outstanding values, risks, safeguarding needs, related documents, and update history. For relics, data should cover architectural condition, materials, restoration, planning, and destination carrying capacity. For intangible heritage, data should cover artisans, practice groups, transmission processes, youth participation, and changes in contemporary life.

Third, data should be classified according to levels of access. Some data can be widely opened for education and communication; some should be available only to management agencies, researchers, or bearer communities; and some data related to sacred rituals, traditional craft secrets, or specialized knowledge should be protected. Data classification helps balance open data and cultural security.

4.3. Developing Human Resources for Digital Heritage Management

First, cultural management officers should be trained and retrained in digital transformation skills. Training should not stop at software use but should include data thinking, platform governance, information security, digital communication, digital law, digital ethics, and assessment of the impacts of technology on heritage.

Second, interdisciplinary experts in digital heritage should be developed. These experts connect managers, cultural researchers, technology specialists, data experts, communication specialists, businesses, and communities. Digital heritage cannot be effectively built if there is technology without cultural understanding, or cultural expertise without technological capacity.

Third, the digital capacity of artisans, practitioners, and bearer communities should be strengthened. Communities need guidance on how to preserve documents, tell heritage stories, verify data, protect their rights, and use digital platforms for transmission and communication. Once communities have digital capacity, they become not only objects of digitization but also co-governors of heritage in the digital environment.

4.4. Ensuring Authenticity, Community Rights, and Sustainable Value Promotion

First, authenticity should be regarded as a central principle in digitizing and promoting heritage values. Every digital product should clearly distinguish original documentation, reconstruction, interpretation, and new creativity. The abridgement, editing, performance, or representation of heritage must remain within limits that do not distort symbolic structures, historical context, cultural space, and spiritual values.

Second, community participation and benefit-sharing rights should be ensured. Before digitizing, publishing, or commercially exploiting heritage data, management agencies and implementing units should have mechanisms for community consultation, defining the scope of publication, acknowledging heritage bearers, and sharing benefits. This is important to prevent the exploitation of heritage without sufficient empowerment or fair benefit for the communities that hold it.

Third, heritage safeguarding should be connected with education, sustainable tourism, and cultural industries. Heritage data can become digital learning materials in schools, cultural communication content, smart-tourism products, and creative material for cultural industries. However, all promotion activities must be guided by sustainability: they must not damage heritage, overload destinations, commercialize heritage excessively, and should include mechanisms for reinvestment in safeguarding.

Fourth, responsible digital communication should be strengthened. In online environments, heritage information spreads rapidly but can also be distorted easily. Cultural management agencies need to cooperate with the press, schools, digital platforms, content creators, and communities to develop heritage narratives that are accurate, attractive, accessible, and still preserve academic and cultural depth.

V. Conclusion

State management of the safeguarding and promotion of cultural heritage values in the current context of digital transformation is both an urgent and long-term task. Digital transformation opens up new possibilities for inventorying, documentation, storage, reconstruction, education, communication, and heritage exploitation, but also creates risks related to authenticity, data rights, commercialization, and community participation. Therefore, digital transformation in the heritage sector cannot be understood merely as the use of technology; it must be a process of renewing management thinking, improving institutions, standardizing data, developing human resources, and building a community-based governance model.

The analysis above affirms that the State plays a facilitating and coordinating role in the digital heritage ecosystem; the community is the center of safeguarding and promotion; scholars provide professional foundations; and businesses and digital platforms help expand reception spaces and social resources. Only when these actors are harmoniously connected can cultural heritage both safeguard its original values and be promoted as an endogenous resource for sustainable development.

In the coming period, the focus of state management should shift from dossier management to data governance; from fragmented digitization to interconnected databases; from incident-based preservation to in-depth heritage governance; and from event-based promotion to an ecosystem of education, tourism, and cultural

industries based on heritage. This is the necessary approach for Vietnamese cultural heritage to remain vibrant in modern life, spread in digital space, and contribute practically to the development of Vietnamese culture and people in the new era.

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