

Research Article

Legitimizing Culinary Heritage: A Comparative Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of Five UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Nominations

Widya Ariyani^{1*}, Barnabas Bram Suarga², and Marthen Mau³

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral Kateketik Santo Fransiskus Asisi Semarang

² Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral Kateketik Santo Fransiskus Asisi Semarang

³ Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injil Arastamar Ngabang

* Corresponding Author: Widya Ariyani

Abstract This study examines how culturally distinct culinary practices are constructed and legitimized as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in UNESCO's nomination discourse. The study employed comparative corpus-assisted discourse analysis on five official UNESCO nomination files: Gastronomic Meal of the French, Mediterranean Diet, Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition, Kimjang, Making and Sharing Kimchi, and Washoku. After removing UNESCO prompts, boilerplate, administrative metadata, and non-comparable sections, the small specialized corpus analyzed consisted of 19,262 words from functionally comparable State Party responses. The analysis was conducted through frequency, normalized frequency, document dispersion, recurrent multi-word patterns, collocation, cross-case lexical comparison, and concordance inspection. The corpus-led patterns were then analyzed using van Leeuwen's discursive legitimation framework. The results show that all five nominations use a shared lexical-semantic repertoire centered on community, tradition, transmission, knowledge, family, sharing, identity, nature, and related heritage values, but this repertoire is configured differently in each case. Three legitimation strategies are robustly found across all nominations: authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization, while mythopoesis is not strongly identified as an independent strategy. These findings indicate a pattern of institutional convergence without discursive uniformity: culturally distinct foodways use shared institutional resources but organize them into different legitimation configurations.

Keywords: culinary heritage; intangible cultural heritage; UNESCO nomination discourse; corpus-assisted discourse analysis; discursive legitimacy; specialized corpus

1. Introduction

Food serves not only as a material necessity but also as a medium for maintaining memory, identity, knowledge, social relationships, and attachment to place. Within the framework of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), the value of a cultural practice lies primarily in the practices, knowledge, skills, meanings, and transmission processes that keep it alive within a community. The 2003 UNESCO Convention defines ICH as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage, are transmitted between generations, are continually recreated, and provide a sense of identity and continuity (UNESCO, 2003). This definition also links ICH to the environment, human interaction with nature, cultural diversity, and human creativity. In this context, foodways are important because the practices of eating, cooking, producing, sharing, and transmitting culinary knowledge connect everyday activities to broader social, symbolic, and historical values.

Since food-related elements were included on the UNESCO Representative List in 2010, food-as-heritage has become a significant area in heritage and food studies. (Herman & Matta,

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2025) demonstrate that the recognition of foodways as an ICH has evolved from a focus on the visibility of cultural practices to issues of safeguarding, education, intergenerational transmission, representation, power, and the relationship between tradition and change. (Bortolotto & Ubertaini, 2018) also emphasize that foodways as an ICH cannot be understood simply as the protection of food as a product. The process of heritagization involves social practices, community, cultural transmission, representation, and the institutionalization of cultural values. Thus, inscription is not only an acknowledgement of something that already exists, but also the process through which foodways are formulated to be recognized as heritage.

Critical food-heritage scholarship demonstrates that this process is not neutral. (Matta, 2016), through Peru's culinary journey to UNESCO, shows how political and economic forces shape the meanings of food heritage. (Lixinski, 2018) shows that food can be framed differently as heritage, biodiversity, human rights, or regulatory objects in international governance. (Csergo, 2018) highlights the relationship between UNESCO food heritage and cultural diversity, globalization, branding, and economic interests, while (da Silva, 2018) shows that the Mediterranean Diet is intertwined with collective identity, expertise, governmentality, and agro-food interests. In Washoku, (Cang, 2018) demonstrates that national food traditions for UNESCO are not simply a direct reflection of established practices but involve formal definition and reconstruction within the institutional heritage system.

Therefore, the novelty of research on UNESCO culinary heritage cannot be built on the claim that nomination files or food heritage discourse have never been studied. (Kohsaka, 2017) has shown that although national food heritage may emphasize uniqueness, reasoning or storylines such as connections to nature, traditional preparation, and community cohesion can be similar across applications. This finding is important because it demonstrates that shared vocabulary or common storylines do not in themselves constitute novelty. (Bouvier & Wu, 2021) also used corpus-based analysis of UNESCO legal instruments and found shifts in the construction of cultural heritage from property to heritage, tangible to intangible, and material-centered to human-centered representations. More recently, (Tubillejas-Andrés et al., 2026) combined qualitative thematic coding, co-occurrence mapping, and semantic comparison to examine how various actors discursively legitimize ICH in rural heritage governance.

This expanding literature actually clarifies the scope for this research's contribution. The research gap lies not in the lack of research on culinary heritage, nomination materials, or UNESCO discourse, but rather in the methodological-analytical configuration. There is still limited research that combines cross-case comparisons of culinary nomination texts from the same institutional genre with corpus-assisted pattern identification and explicit analysis of the discursive function of legitimation. With this configuration, the research question can move from "what vocabulary is repeated?" to "what argumentative work does this vocabulary perform when cultural practices must be made institutionally legible as heritage?"

This study compares five successful UNESCO ICH nominations: Gastronomic Meal of the French, Mediterranean Diet, Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition, Kimjang, Making and Sharing Kimchi, and Washoku. The five cases were chosen to elicit a variety of culinary practice forms—ritualized meal, multinational dietary system, beverage-centered social practice, communal food preparation, and national dietary culture—while maintaining the same institutional genre. The study uses corpus-assisted procedures to identify recurring lexical-semantic patterns and a discursive legitimation framework to interpret the function of these patterns. Its contribution lies not in claiming that culinary nominations use similar vocabulary, but in explaining how recurring institutional resources are configured into different forms of legitimacy.

Empirically, this design allows for controlled comparison of heterogeneous practices in a relatively homogeneous textual setting. Methodologically, the study prioritizes corpus-led discovery before theory-informed interpretation to prevent theoretical categories from becoming search templates that determine the results from the outset. Analytically, the study examines the relationship between institutional constraints and cultural differentiation. This focus is guided by three research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What recurring lexical-semantic patterns are used to construct heritage value in the five selected UNESCO culinary heritage nominations?

RQ2. How is the discursive legitimation strategy realized through these recurring patterns in nomination discourse?

RQ3. How do legitimacy configurations show convergence and divergence among the five culinary heritage nominations?

The five cases also contrast national and multinational constructions of culinary heritage. Mediterranean Diet is a multinational nomination, while the other four cases are presented primarily through national institutional frames, although the practices themselves may have histories and circulations that transcend borders. This variation allows the study to examine whether the shared UNESCO vocabulary produces uniform forms of legitimacy or instead allows for culturally specific meanings. Because the focus is on textual legitimacy, the study does not evaluate whether the cultural claims in the nominations are ethnographically "true." What is analyzed is how these claims are constructed and given justificatory force within institutional documents.

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1 Culinary Heritage as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Culinary heritage studies are based on the understanding that food as heritage cannot be reduced to objects or products consumed. In the context of ICH, attention focuses on the social practices, knowledge, skills, rituals, memories, and interpersonal relationships that enable foodways to continue to be practiced and passed down. (Bortolotto & Ubertazzi, 2018) emphasize that foodways are relevant to the ICH regime because food is connected to ritual, identity, community life, and cultural transmission. (K.-S. Lee, 2023) views food heritage as an immaterial inheritance carried out through everyday practices, embodied knowledge, memory, communality, and food-making. (Almansouri et al., 2022) identify legacy, people, and place as important dimensions of heritage food and demonstrate that authenticity can change through social influences, adaptation, ingredient availability, and the actors who produce it. Thus, words such as traditional, local, family, or generation do not need to be treated as objective evidence of authenticity; they can all be resources that construct relationships between practice, the past, people, and place.

Heritageization, therefore, is not simply a statement that a food is "traditional." It determines how tradition, continuity, community, and cultural value are defined. (Matta, 2016) shows that international food heritage recognition can be shaped by political and economic forces, allowing discourse on continuity to coexist with competitive heritage-making. (Csergo, 2018) demonstrates the relationship between recognition and globalization and collective heritage branding; (da Silva, 2018) examines the Mediterranean Diet through identity, epistemic authority, governmentality, and wider agro-food interests; while (Cang, 2018) shows how Washoku must be formally formulated for the UNESCO context and is influenced by precedent nominations. (Lixinski, 2018) expands on this by demonstrating that food operates within multiple international legal regimes, making heritage only one of several possible institutional framings.

This perspective needs to be balanced with studies that do not make global recognition the sole center of heritage-making. (Matta, 2019) shows that locally grounded foodways can become a medium for cultural resurgence through nature-culture relationships and community imaginaries that develop outside of prestige-oriented international heritage institutions. This serves as a reminder that the UNESCO nomination discourse is only one arena in which foodways are accorded heritage value. However, precisely because UNESCO is an institutional arena with explicit criteria and procedures, nomination files offer a highly productive context for comparing how cultural values are translated into internationally recognizable forms of justification.

Institutionalization also creates a tension between cultural particularity and standardized recognition. (DeSoucey et al., 2019) call this process rationalized authenticity: diverse cultural forms remain celebrated as distinct, but are translated through forms that demonstrate relevance beyond their original context. This concept helps explain why cultural difference does not necessarily disappear when heritage claims follow standardized procedures. Instead, standardization can be a medium that allows particularity to be displayed within an institutional vocabulary shared by other applicants.

The relationship between safeguarding and commercialization is not simple. (Bortolotto, 2021) highlights the tension between the use of market mechanisms and the risks of over-commercialization, misappropriation, and decontextualization in heritage governance. (Zheng, 2023) demonstrates that digital platforms can simultaneously support the visibility and safeguarding of food-related ICH while accelerating commercialization. These studies broaden the understanding that food heritage is not just about cultural recognition, but also about networks of circulation, governance, economic value, and representation.

The literature on sustainability exhibits a similarly complex pattern. (Zocchi et al., 2021) show that safeguarding food heritage can support the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of sustainable food systems, but these relationships overlap with transmission, biodiversity, local knowledge, and socio-economic change. (Ossowska et al., 2024) found that traditional food production can contribute to local sustainability, but socio-cultural and economic objectives can outweigh environmental goals. Therefore, sustainability is more appropriately treated as one possible dimension of heritage value, rather than the universal endpoint of culinary heritage. This position is crucial for the current research because ecological language is allowed to emerge from the corpus, rather than being established as a theme from the outset.

The literature on individual cases also shows that the social meanings of culinary heritage vary. (G. Lee, 2018) places Korean foodways and traditional knowledge in the relationship between ICH protection and legal safeguarding. (Surya & Lee, 2022) show that Kimjang is not only related to food preparation but also to communal bonds, cultural identity, philosophical values, and a relationship to nature. These studies strengthen the case against treating food nominations as a single, homogeneous semantic category.

Overall, the food heritage literature shows that culinary heritage is formed through a process of selection, representation, institutionalization, and negotiation that bridges cultural particularity with broader heritage categories. The next question is no longer whether this process is institutional, but how UNESCO's institutional setting provides the conditions and constraints for the legitimacy process.

2.2 UNESCO Nomination Discourse as Institutional Heritage Formation

Critical heritage studies provide a basis for reading nomination files not as transparent descriptions of culture, but as institutional heritage-making. (Smith, 2006) views heritage as a cultural process through which values, identity, memory, and social meanings are constructed and negotiated. The concept of Authorized Heritage Discourse also highlights how institutions and forms of expertise influence what can be recognized as heritage and through what vocabulary heritage value is communicated. (Smith & Akagawa, 2009) show that the shift to intangible heritage does not eliminate issues of definitions, community involvement, management, authority, and institutional safeguarding. (Hafstein, 2018) further demonstrates that the UNESCO ICH Convention helps "make" heritage through lists, categories, programs, and institutional mechanisms that change how practices are understood.

This institutional character is evident in the Representative List criteria. UNESCO requires submitting States to demonstrate that nominated elements meet R.1–R.5, including status as an ICH, contribution to visibility and dialogue, safeguarding measures, community participation and consent, and inventory inclusio. Thus, nomination is not a free cultural description. It is an institutionally constrained justificatory genre: States must explain cultural practices through categories related to continuity, community, transmission, visibility, safeguarding, participation, and broader heritage values.

Institutional constraints do not mean that the discourse of all nominations is identical. (Bortolotto et al., 2020) show that the ideal of community participation in UNESCO ICH translates into bureaucratic procedures and specific forms of evidence. In other words, institutional principles must be transformed into forms that can be documented and evaluated. (DeSoucey et al., 2019) also help explain why standardized procedures can coexist with claims of cultural authenticity and difference. Therefore, common institutional prompts can create convergence without eliminating selective cultural positioning by States Parties.

(Bouvier & Wu, 2021) provide important methodological precedent through a corpus-based analysis of UNESCO legal instruments. They show that heritage vocabulary in institutional documents shifts from property to heritage, tangible to intangible, and material-centered to human-centered representations. This study demonstrates that language is not

simply a neutral medium for pre-existing heritage concepts; lexical patterns themselves are part of institutional meaning-making. However, legal instruments have a different communicative purpose than nomination forms. Nominations are written by States Parties to demonstrate that specific cultural practices meet institutional criteria, making them more directly justificatory.

Based on this literature, this study views nomination as a persuasive-justificatory institutional discourse. States Parties must not only describe culinary practices but also explain why those practices can be recognized as heritage, why they are valuable, and why their recognition or safeguarding is justified. This position serves as a bridge to corpus-assisted analysis and discursive legitimacy.

2.3 Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis and Discursive Legitimacy

Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) combines corpus techniques with discourse analysis to identify recurrent linguistic patterns while maintaining contextual interpretation. (Partington et al., 2013) emphasize the relationship between patterns, meanings, evaluation, and rhetoric; (Baker, 2023) places frequency, concordance, collocation, and keyness as the main tools of corpus-based discourse analysis. (Baker et al., 2008) show that collocation and concordance can help identify recurring representations while guiding close qualitative examination of relevant textual contexts. (Heritage & Taylor, 2024) also emphasize the integration of corpus evidence with discourse interpretation in representation studies.

Corpus size does not always have to be large. (Koester, 2010) suggests that small specialized corpora can have advantages because genre, setting, and topic are more controlled, making it easier to link linguistic patterns to contextual features. Representativeness in such designs should be assessed relative to the specialized domain, not by comparing it to a mega-corpora. This principle aligns with the current study, which did not aim to make population inferences on all UNESCO culinary nominations, but rather conducted controlled comparisons within the same genre.

CADS itself does not explain the legitimacy function of each pattern. Therefore, this study uses (van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008) discursive legitimacy framework, which distinguishes authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis. Authorization grants legitimacy through authority, tradition, custom, law, or expertise. Moral evaluation operates through value systems. Rationalization grants legitimacy through goals, uses, functions, or bodies of knowledge. Mythopoesis operates through narratives that link legitimate or illegitimate actions with desirable or negative consequences.

The relationship between lexical patterns and legitimacy categories is not automatically assumed. The word "tradition," for example, is only coded as authorization if the context actually uses historical or customary continuity to justify heritage value. "Community" can signal ownership, participation, beneficiary, or social cohesion depending on the context. Therefore, the analytical logic of this study is corpus-led discovery followed by theory-informed interpretation. Corpus procedures first identify recurrent configurations; concordance contexts are then examined to determine the justificatory work performed by those patterns. This combination allows the study to move from "what patterns recur?" to "what justificatory work do those patterns perform?"

3. Methodology

3.1 Data and Case Selection

The study used comparative corpus-assisted discourse analysis on five official UNESCO nomination files for the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The cases were selected purposively with maximum-variation logic: all texts belong to the same institutional genre and have comparable communicative purposes, but represent different forms of culinary practice. The five cases are Gastronomic Meal of the French (France, 2010), Mediterranean Diet (Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco, 2010), Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition (Türkiye, 2013), Kimjang, Making and Sharing Kimchi (Republic of Korea, 2013), and Washoku (Japan, 2013). This selection allows for variations between ritualized meals, multinational dietary systems, beverage-centered social practices, communal food preparation, and national dietary cultures without mixing different document genres.

The corpus was not intended as a statistical sample of all UNESCO culinary nominations. It was constructed as a small specialized corpus for analytical cross-case comparison (Koester, 2010). After cleaning, the corpus consisted of 19,262 analytical words: "Gastronomic Meal of the French" (3,349 words), "Mediterranean Diet" (5,584), "Turkish Coffee" (3,475), "Kimjang" (3,264), and "Washoku" (3,590). The four documents are relatively close in size, while "Mediterranean Diet" is longer; therefore, raw frequencies were not used alone in the cross-case comparison.

Not all English-language documents have the same original-language status. Gastronomic Meal of the French is the official English version of the French original; Mediterranean Diet has both English and French originals; while the three 2013 nominations are original English texts. Therefore, the data are referred to as official English-language nomination forms, not English-original nominations. These differences are recorded as metadata and then tested through translation sensitivity analysis. The composition of the corpus is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Composition of the analytical corpus

Elements and sources	Year	Country	Document language status	Word count
<i>Gastronomic Meal of the French</i> (No. 00437; (UNESCO, 2010a))	2010	French	Official English version; original in French	3,349
<i>Mediterranean Diet</i> (No. 00394; (UNESCO, 2010b))	2010	Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco	Native English and French	5,584
<i>Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition</i> (No. 00645; (UNESCO, 2013b))	2013	Turkish	Original English	3,475
<i>Kimjang, Making and Sharing Kimchi</i> (No. 00881; (UNESCO, 2013a))	2013	Republic of Korea	Original English	3,264
<i>Washoku, Traditional Dietary Cultures of the Japanese</i> (No. 00869; (UNESCO, 2013c))	2013	Japan	Original English	3,590
Total				19,262

Note: Word counts refer to cleaned State Party responses in functionally comparable sections (R.1, R.2, 3.a, 3.b, and 4.a). The file number is the official UNESCO nomination number for the primary data source of the study.

3.2 Corpus Preparation

The 2010 and 2013 versions of ICH-02 are not completely identical. To mitigate template-version effects, the main corpus excluded all forms indiscriminately. The analysis was limited to State Party responses in functionally comparable sections: R.1 Identification and Definition of the Element; R.2 Contribution to Visibility, Awareness, and Dialogue; Section 3.a past/current safeguarding efforts; Section 3.b proposed safeguarding measures; and Section 4.a community participation in the nomination process.

UNESCO prompts, questions, criterion descriptions, word-limit instructions, headers, boilerplate, identification metadata, contact details, competent-body lists, signatures, emails, URLs, consent documentation, documentation/reference lists, and non-comparable preliminary sections were excluded. R.5 inventory compliance was also excluded because its primary function is to prove administrative eligibility. This cleanup serves two purposes. First, it prevents terms derived from UNESCO prompts—for example, community, identity, transmission, or sustainable development—from being counted as State Parties' lexical choices. Second, the restriction to functionally comparable sections improve comparability between templates.

All source documents are machine-readable, eliminating the need for OCR. Legacy .doc files were converted locally to .docx files before final extraction to preserve Unicode and diacritics. Cleaned files were then stored as separate case texts and annotated versions with

section markers. The basic unit of analysis remained a single nomination text; the multinational Mediterranean Diet was not duplicated by participating state.

3.3 Corpus-Assisted Analysis Procedures

The analysis follows the principles of CADS, using corpus evidence as a systematic entry point toward contextual interpretation (Baker, 2023; Baker et al., 2008; Partington et al., 2013). First, word frequencies are examined, and inflectional or closely related morphological forms are combined through transparent rule-based lexical families, such as community/communities, tradition/traditional, and transmit/transmission. Because the nominations differ in size, cross-case comparison uses normalized frequency per 1,000 words alongside raw frequency. Document dispersion is calculated to distinguish pooled high frequencies originating from a single case from lexical patterns that are truly repeated across documents.

Next, 2–4-word *n*-grams were explored for recurrent phrases with document frequency in at least three of the five nominations. Collocation analysis was performed on central nodes that emerged as relevant semantic resources, including COMMUNITY, TRADITION, TRANSMISSION, HERITAGE, IDENTITY, and NATURE, using a span of ± 5 words. Association strength was examined with logDice, but collocation was also assessed based on document dispersion and concordance context.

To identify lexical contrasts between cases, each nomination was compared exploratively with the other four combined using log-likelihood (G^2) and log-ratio effect sizes. Keyness was used as a descriptive aid to find candidates for close reading, not as inferential evidence regarding the entire population of UNESCO nominations. Section-level lexical profiles were calculated for R.1, R.2, 3.a, 3.b, and 4.a to distinguish recurring vocabulary partially influenced by a particular communicative function in the template from broader cross-case patterns.

The analytical sequence moves from frequency and dispersion to recurrent phrases, collocations, cross-case contrasts, and concordance examination. Frequency or statistical association are not considered sufficient to generate discourse interpretation. Patterns that are considered substantively relevant must demonstrate recurrence and/or be supported by concordance evidence.

3.4 Coding Legitimacy and Robustness Checks

The interpretive stage uses (van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008), but theoretical categories are not used as search terms to generate corpus patterns. Coding is performed after exploratory corpus analysis. The coding unit is a legitimation episode, namely a clause or sentence that contextually justifies, validates, evaluates, or makes desirable: (a) culinary practice as heritage, (b) its safeguarding/transmission, or (c) its inscription/recognition. Purely descriptive statements are not coded. One episode can receive more than one code if it performs several justificatory functions.

Authorization is interpreted through tradition/history, collective or conformity authority, expert/institutional authority, and cultural authority. Moral evaluation encompasses identity/belonging, solidarity/cohesion, respect/diversity, nature/well-being, hospitality, and symbolic value. Rationalization encompasses social, safeguarding/transmission, ecological/health, institutional/visibility, and practical functions. Mythopoesis uses stricter criteria: proverbs, historical references, or ritual scenes alone are insufficient without a narrative structure that connects conduct to desirable or negative consequences.

Robustness checks were performed on three potential sources of bias. First, document-length imbalance was controlled through normalized rates and document dispersion. Second, translation sensitivity was tested by repeating the lexical-family analysis after removing the French-original Gastronomic Meal. Third, section/template sensitivity was tested through R.1-only comparison. All claims are limited to the five selected nominations or this specialized corpus, not generalized to the entire UNESCO culinary heritage discourse.

To maintain auditability, each case retained section markers after cleaning so that pooled analysis could be traced back to the source section. Word counts in the core corpus were also checked per section. R.1 has a relatively comparable size across cases and therefore serves as an important basis for section-sensitivity checks, while Mediterranean Diet has a longer safeguarding section, which is one reason pooled counts are always read alongside

normalization and dispersion. A single nomination remains treated as a single document for dispersion; multinational status does not duplicate a single text into multiple observations.

In lexical-family analysis, form merging is only performed when the morphological and semantic core relationships are sufficiently transparent. The goal is not to automatically stem the entire vocabulary, but to reduce fragmentation among clearly related concepts. Raw outputs are retained as analytical backup so that grouping decisions can be traced. Similarly, collocation and keyness are treated as exploratory diagnostics. Candidates that appear to be strong associations but only appear in one case are not automatically treated as shared discourse patterns.

Concordance reading is performed by considering the surrounding clause/sentence and, if necessary, the paragraph context. Coding legitimacy is determined based on what is being justified and how it is being justified. For example, a historical reference can serve as authorization when continuity is used as the basis for validity, but can serve as descriptive background when it does not fulfill a justificatory role. This criterion is used to avoid keyword determinism and maintain consistency between corpus evidence and qualitative interpretation.

4. Results

4.1 Shared Lexical-Semantic Repertoire in the Construction of Heritage Values

The analysis shows that the five nominations use a shared lexical-semantic repertoire even though the nominated culinary practices differ. Based on a combination of pooled frequency, normalized frequency, document dispersion, and analytical relevance, the lexical families selected to represent the shared heritage-value repertoire include CULTURE (222; 11.53 per 1,000 words), COMMUNITY (163; 8.46), TRADITION (126; 6.54), LOCAL (104; 5.40), SOCIAL (81; 4.21), SAFEGUARD (79; 4.10), TRANSMISSION (70; 3.63), KNOWLEDGE (51; 2.65), FAMILY (50; 2.60), SHARING (48; 2.49), NATURE (35; 1.82), GENERATION (34; 1.77), RESPECT (31; 1.61), DIVERSITY (23; 1.19), and IDENTITY (20; 1.04). All of these families appear in 5/5 documents, so the recurrence does not come from just one longer nomination. A summary of the data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Shared lexical-semantic repertoire across five nominations

Lexical family	Frequency (n)	Dispersion	Per 1,000 words
CULTURE	222	5/5	11.53
COMMUNITY	163	5/5	8.46
TRADITION	126	5/5	6.54
LOCAL	104	5/5	5.40
SOCIAL	81	5/5	4.21
SAFEGUARD	79	5/5	4.10
TRANSMISSION	70	5/5	3.63
KNOWLEDGE	51	5/5	2.65
FAMILY	50	5/5	2.60
SHARING	48	5/5	2.49
NATURE	35	5/5	1.82
GENERATION	34	5/5	1.77
RESPECT	31	5/5	1.61
DIVERSITY	23	5/5	1.19
IDENTITY	20	5/5	1.04

Note: Lexical families were selected based on a combination of frequency, dispersion, and analytical relevance; this table is not a literal ranking of the top 15 lexical families. Normalized values are calculated per 1,000 analytical words.

This pattern shows that heritage value is not only constructed through words that explicitly name culture or tradition. The repertoire also includes resources that denote bearers and social relations (COMMUNITY, FAMILY, SOCIAL), continuity and transmission (TRANSMISSION, GENERATION, KNOWLEDGE), valued relations (SHARING, RESPECT, IDENTITY), and relationships with locality and the environment (LOCAL, NATURE). Descriptively, the corpus therefore demonstrates a relatively broad institutional vocabulary for discussing what makes cultural practices worthy of recognition and safeguarding.

Recurrent multi-word sequences reinforce these findings. Phrases appearing across all five nominations include the community (29 occurrences), safeguarding measures (28), transmission of (23), contribute to (17), cultural diversity (9), and human creativity (8). Some bundles directly reflect UNESCO's institutional vocabulary, but their recurrence in cleaned State Party responses still indicates that these categories are drawn upon and used in substantive argumentation. In particular, contribute to suggests an orientation toward consequences or functions: the nomination states not only what the practice is, but also what the practice, safeguarding, or inscription can do for communities and wider heritage goals.

Concordance evidence suggests that this recurrence is not simply a lexical artifact. In the Gastronomic Meal of the French, gastronomic tradition is described as a practice passed down from generation to generation and continually updated through new knowledge and know-how; this relationship is then linked to identity and belonging. The Mediterranean Diet also links food practices with social sharing, celebrations, and transmission across generations. In Turkish Coffee, the vocabulary of tradition recurs in descriptions of coffeehouses, household practices, hospitality, and continuing socialization. Kimjang links family-specific methods with transmission, sharing, and collective practice, while Washoku links intergenerational knowledge with locality, nature, and annual practices.

However, the explicit lexical family HERITAGE is not uniformly distributed. In the cleaned comparable corpus, this family appears 31 times in Gastronomic Meal of the French, 44 times in Mediterranean Diet, 14 times in Kimjang, three times in Turkish Coffee, and does not appear in Washoku. The absence of HERITAGE in the cleaned Washoku responses is an interesting pattern, but it cannot be treated as an absence of heritage construction. This nomination builds value through other resources such as transmission, tradition, community, knowledge, continuity, and nature. Thus, repeated self-labeling as “heritage” is not a necessary lexical condition for the construction of heritage value in the corpus.

4.2 Distribution of Inheritance Values Conditioned by Genre

Section-level analysis shows that some lexical patterns are influenced by the communicative function nomination form. SAFEGUARD achieved the highest normalized rate in Section 3.b proposed safeguarding measures (8.91 per 1,000 words), while PARTICIPATION achieved the highest normalized rate in Section 4.a community participation (9.18). COMMUNITY also achieved a very high concentration in 4.a, consistent with the section's need to explain involvement of communities. DIVERSITY and DIALOGUE peaked at R.2, 3.92 and 3.52 per 1,000 words, respectively, consistent with the section's function in explaining visibility, dialogue, cultural diversity, and the broader significance of inscription.

R.1 shows a different profile. The section defining the nominated elements has the highest concentration of TRANSMISSION (5.99), FAMILY (5.65), and SHARING (5.15), and is a key location for NATURE and tradition-related language. These terms are more closely associated with representations of how practices are carried out, inherited, and embedded in everyday social relations. In contrast, safeguarding and participation language are more strongly influenced by institutional requirements in later sections.

However, genre conditioning does not eliminate cross-case differences. When comparisons are limited to R.1 alone, Mediterranean Diet remains strongest on COMMUNITY, Turkish Coffee on TRADITION, Kimjang on FAMILY, Washoku on TRANSMISSION, NATURE, and KNOWLEDGE, and Gastronomic Meal of the French on explicit HERITAGE vocabulary. The shared template therefore directs discourse toward

common semantic domains without fully determining the relative weighting or combination chosen by each nomination.

4.3 Three Robust Modes of Discursive Legitimacy

Concordance-led coding revealed three consistent discursive legitimization strategies across all five nominations: authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization. These strategies are not reduced to keyword counts; their classification is determined by their justificatory function in context.

Authorization is primarily realized through historical continuity, tradition, community recognition, intergenerational authority, and expertise. The Gastronomic Meal of the French utilizes both inherited tradition and community endorsement. The nomination cites a 2009 survey that found 95.2% of French respondents considered gastronomic meals part of their cultural heritage and identity, and 98.7% desired safeguarding and transmission to future generations. These figures serve as evidence that the practice is not simply "old," but collectively recognized and desired to continue.

The Mediterranean Diet exhibits a more layered authorization. Eating together is framed as an inherited practice with historical depth and cultural authority, while health and well-being values, experienced since antiquity, are claimed to have been validated by science. Traditional inheritance and modern expert knowledge therefore serve as complementary sources of legitimacy. Turkish Coffee relies on historical/customary authority through continuity since the 16th century, coffeehouse culture, and society-wide recognition. Kimjang and Washoku more intensively mobilize distributed intergenerational authority through family, elders, experts, schools, teachers, and community bearers.

Moral evaluation makes practice desirable through positive social and cultural values. Turkish coffee centers on hospitality, friendship, socialization, and companionship; coffeehouses are represented as spaces for conversation, news sharing, reading, and social contact. Kimjang links making and sharing with family cooperation, solidarity, Korean identity, and harmony with nature. In some community events, the kimchi produced is shared with people in need, thus giving sharing the explicit moral value of social solidarity. Washoku emphasizes respect for nature, identity, continuity, health, and social cohesion. The French Gastronomic Meal positively values conviviality, shared pleasure, belonging, and social ties, while the Mediterranean Diet links eating together with continuity, well-being, creativity, and social exchange. The common institutional repertoire therefore does not produce a common hierarchy of values.

Rationalization explains the functions or beneficial consequences of practice, safeguarding, and inscription. Recurrent constructs such as contribute to, strengthen, promote, encourage, help, and ensure demonstrate a strong orientation toward social utility. The Mediterranean Diet explicitly organizes claims as functions, including bringing people together and strengthening social links, and connects practice to landscapes, resources, health, and intercultural exchange. The Gastronomic Meal of the French rationalizes recognition through its potential contribution to environmental management, biodiversity, landscapes, and the social fabric. Turkish Coffee links recognition with awareness, socialization, communication, and transmission.

Washoku produces the most elaborate ecological rationalization. Respect for nature is associated with preservation practices, the use of local ingredients, reduced waste, efficient resource use, lower transportation costs, and contributions to a sustainable society. Kimjang also activates ecological knowledge, but more closely links it to seasonal preparation, family practices, sharing, and social solidarity. Thus, ecological rationalization does not take a uniform form, even when nature appears in more than one case.

Mythopoesis does not meet the same threshold. Proverbs, historical references, and ritual scenes do appear. Turkish Coffee, for example, uses a proverb about the memory of a cup of coffee to emphasize the depth of cultural meaning, and Mediterranean Diet uses a reference to Plutarch when framing eating together. However, these examples do not generally form sustained moral or cautionary narratives with structured desirable/undesirable consequences. Therefore, they are coded according to their contextual function as cultural authorization or moral evaluation, rather than as independent mythopoesis. The cross-case configurations are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Configuration of discursive legitimacy in the five nominations

Element	<i>Authorization</i>	<i>Moral evaluation</i>	<i>Rationalization</i>	<i>Mythopoesis</i>
<i>Gastronomic Meal of the French</i>	tradition/history; community endorsement; institutional evidence	identity; belonging; conviviality	social ties; transmission; environment; visibility	Not robustly identified
<i>Mediterranean Diet</i>	inherited traditions; scientific expertise; cultural authority	identity; togetherness; health; symbolic value	social links; resources; health; dialogue	Not robustly identified
<i>Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition</i>	historical continuity; society-wide recognition; cultural authority	hospitality; friendship; sociality	communication; transmission; awareness	Not robustly identified
<i>Kimjang, Making and Sharing Kimchi</i>	family heritage; generations; generations; institutional and educational authorities	Korean identity; solidarity; sharing; harmony with nature	cooperation; transmission; ecological knowledge	Not robustly identified
<i>Washoku</i>	generations; generations; elders; experts; teachers	identity; continuity; cohesion; respect for nature	transmission; health; resource efficiency; dialogue	Not robustly identified

Note: The column summarizes the sources or functions of legitimation identified through concordance-led coding. The table does not indicate prevalence percentages; a single legitimation episode may receive more than one code. Mythopoesis was not robustly identified based on the study's strict criteria.

4.4 Shared Repertoire, Different Configurations of Legitimacy

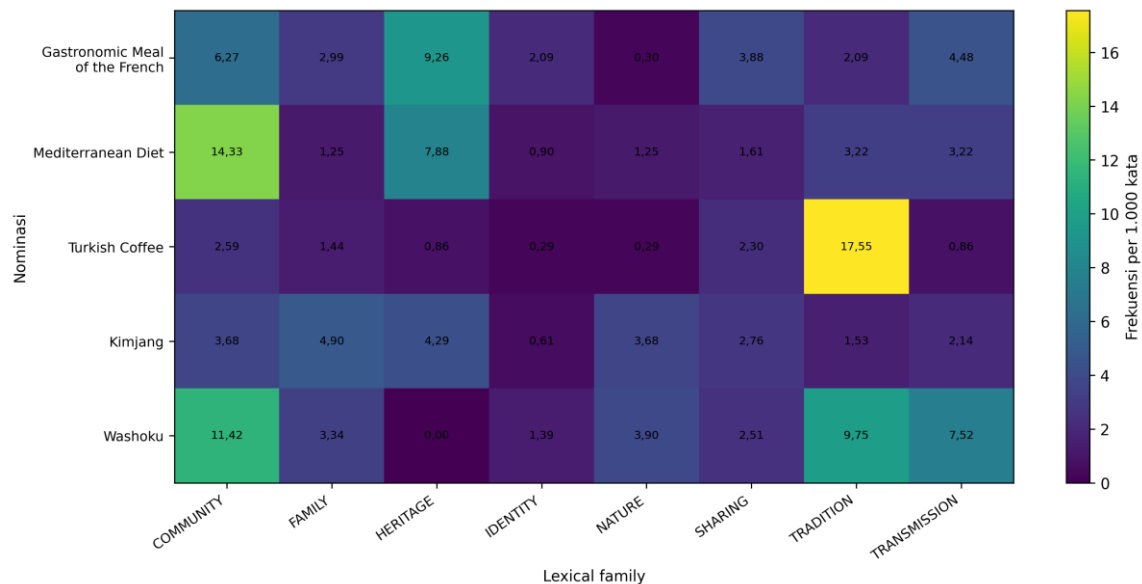
Cross-case comparisons show that the strongest convergence occurs in the available repertoire, while divergence occurs in relative weighting and functional combination. The Mediterranean Diet and Washoku are both strong in COMMUNITY, but the Mediterranean Diet links it to transnationality, social functions, and scientific validation, while Washoku links it to locality, intergenerational transmission, knowledge, and nature. Turkish Coffee and Washoku are both tradition-oriented, but tradition in Turkish Coffee is configured with hospitality and coffeehouse sociality, while in Washoku with transmission and ecological value.

Kimjang and Washoku both activate nature, but their moral and rationalized consequences differ. Kimjang links the relationship to nature with sharing, solidarity, seasonal preparation, and collective identity, while Washoku links it with resource efficiency, preservation, local ingredients, and environmental benefits. The Gastronomic Meal of the French differs further because explicit heritage and identity are more prominent and combined with community endorsement and conviviality. This pattern demonstrates that common resources acquire different justificatory roles when placed within different cultural practices.

Normalized case profiles support this contrast. The French Gastronomic Meal has a strong explicit HERITAGE orientation and a relative emphasis on IDENTITY. The Mediterranean Diet has the highest COMMUNITY rate, 14.33 per 1,000 words. Turkish Coffee is a clear outlier in TRADITION, 17.55 per 1,000. Kimjang stands out in FAMILY (4.90) and NATURE (3.68).

Washoku has high TRANSMISSION (7.52), NATURE (3.90), COMMUNITY (11.42), and TRADITION (9.75). These figures are not treated as independent explanations, but as quantitative support for the functional differences identified through concordance. A visual comparison is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Heatmap of normalized lexical-semantic profiles across five nominations



Note. Values indicate frequency per 1,000 analytical words. Heatmaps are used to compare relative lexical emphasis between cases; visual intensity does not represent a significance test.

Robustness checks support pattern stability. When French-original translated nominations are excluded, the ranking of 24 lexical families at $N = 4$ is very close to that of the main corpus (Spearman $\rho = 0.978$), 14 of the top 15 families remain the same, and 22 of the 24 families maintain a dispersion of 4/4. The main case-specific signatures also persist in R.1-only comparisons. Thus, shared-repertoire finding does not depend on the translated French document, while cross-case differences cannot be reduced solely to later-section template effects.

Overall, the results indicate two concomitant tendencies. The five nominations used recurring institutional resources, but these resources did not produce identical representations. They were primarily realized through authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization, with varying relative emphasis and semantic combinations.

Differences in normalized profiles also show that high frequency within a family does not automatically imply dominance in the overall legitimation process. Turkish Coffee, for example, has a very high TRADITION rate but a much lower TRANSMISSION rate than Washoku. Washoku, on the other hand, combines tradition with community, transmission, nature, and knowledge. Mediterranean Diet has the highest COMMUNITY rate but does not produce the same configuration as Washoku because its concordance contexts are more often related to emblematic communities, shared social functions, transnational framing, and health-related expertise. Thus, normalized rates function primarily as a map of relative emphasis that must be read in conjunction with contextual evidence.

Case-level keyness reinforces this contrast exploratively. Mediterranean Diet highlights the terms communities, transnational, protection, and expertise; Turkish Coffee features coffeehouses and socialization; Kimjang highlights making, winter, household, and learn; Washoku features local, dietary, grassroots, groups, and ingredients; while Gastronomic Meal of the French more frequently uses gastronomic, meal, rites, heritage, and pleasure. Because keyness is compared against four other nominations in the same corpus, the results are not interpreted as “keywords of national culture,” but as relative lexical distinctiveness in a small comparative dataset.

Authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization can also overlap within the same legitimization episode. Statements about family transmission, for example, can present family elders as authorities while simultaneously evaluating continuity positively. Claims about respect for nature can function as moral evaluation and simultaneously serve as a basis for rationalization regarding sustainable resource use. Multiple coding is therefore used when completely different justificatory functions are present within a single episode. This overlap demonstrates that legitimization strategies are more appropriately read as interacting resources rather than mutually exclusive boxes.

The Gastronomic Meal of the French exemplifies the interaction between collective authorization and moral evaluation. Survey evidence displays broad recognition, while lexical context links that recognition to identity and the desire for transmission. The Mediterranean Diet combines the authority of inherited practice, citation of cultural authority, and scientific expertise with rationalized claims about health and social links. Turkish Coffee ties historical continuity to the positive valuation of hospitality and friendship. Kimjang links family transmission to solidarity, identity, and practical sharing. Washoku connects elders/experts as transmitters with the value of respect for nature and functional arguments about resources, health, and cohesion. These differences form the basis of Table 3 in the final manuscript, which summarizes the source of authorization, valued domains, and rationalized functions per case without converting the coding to percentage-based comparisons.

5. Discussion

5.1 Institutional Convergence without Discursive Uniformity

The findings show that five culturally distinct culinary nominations use a shared institutional repertoire, but convergence in vocabulary does not produce a uniform discourse. This pattern supports and extends (Kohsaka, 2017), who has shown that claims of uniqueness can coexist with similar reasoning or storylines in food heritage applications. Thus, similarity alone cannot be the primary contribution. The current research's contribution lies in functional configuration: common resources perform different justificatory work when practices must be made institutionally legible as heritage.

These findings can be interpreted through (DeSoucey et al., 2019) rationalized authenticity. Standardized institutional procedures allow diverse cultural forms to maintain their particularity while employing forms of justification recognizable within the international heritage regime. From this perspective, common terms like community, tradition, transmission, or diversity are not evidence that cultural differences have disappeared. These terms are resources that make different practices comparable and institutionally recognizable.

However, templates do not determine outcomes. If shared institutional forms directly generate uniformity, major case profiles should weaken when the analysis is limited to functionally comparable sections. The opposite is found: Mediterranean Diet remains prominent in community, Turkish Coffee in tradition, Kimjang in family, and Washoku in transmission/nature/knowledge in R.1-only comparisons. The UNESCO nomination architecture is therefore more accurately understood as providing discursive constraints and affordances, while States Parties continue to exercise selective cultural positioning.

This interpretation is consistent with (Smith, 2006) and (Hafstein, 2018), who position heritage as a process of meaning-making and institutional production, not an inherent value. Nomination can be understood as one location where cultural practices are recontextualized as heritage. (Smith & Akagawa, 2009) also remind us that intangible heritage still involves questions of authority, community, governance, and institutional intervention. In the context of culinary nominations, institutionalization works through a format that asks applicants to explain continuity, community, safeguarding, visibility, and participation, but the answers still carry different cultural meanings.

The results of this study are therefore best summarized as institutional convergence without discursive uniformity. Convergence arises because common criteria and genres provide a shared discursive architecture. Uniformity does not occur because practices carry different histories, social relations, moral values, bearers, and forms of knowledge. This formulation is an interpretation of the five nominations examined here, not a universal claim about the entire UNESCO discourse.

5.2 Legitimacy as Configuration

The second finding is that heritage value is not built through isolated keywords, but through configurations of authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization. Authorization addresses what provides validity—tradition, community recognition, family or elder authority, cultural authority, or expertise. Moral evaluation addresses what social values make a practice desirable—identity, solidarity, hospitality, respect, cohesion, health, or harmony with nature. Rationalization addresses what functions or beneficial consequences of the practice/recognition—transmission, social ties, visibility, dialogue, health, or ecological outcomes.

Configuration differences are important because the presence of the same broad strategies does not imply identical legitimacy. The Mediterranean Diet combines inherited tradition with modern scientific validation, allowing antiquity and expertise to work together. Turkish Coffee combines historical continuity with hospitality, friendship, and communicative sociality. Kimjang combines family authority with sharing and solidarity. Washoku combines distributed intergenerational authority with respect for nature and ecological rationalization. The Gastronomic Meal of the French combines community endorsement with identity, conviviality, and social utility. Thus, analytical value lies in the relationships between resources, not just the count of each category.

The findings on Kimjang resonate with (Surya & Lee, 2022), who position Kimjang as a communal and value-laden practice that fosters social bonds, identity, and a relationship to nature. However, corpus analysis adds detail on how these values function justifiably: family transmission provides authorization, solidarity/sharing provides moral evaluation, and social/ecological benefits generate rationalization. A similar pattern is seen in Washoku, but with a different configuration. This comparison demonstrates why thematic similarity is not sufficient to understand legitimacy.

These results extend the corpus-based work of (Bouvier & Wu, 2021). While their study demonstrated institutional meaning-making through lexical-semantic shifts in legal instruments, this study examines State Party nomination discourse and asks how recurring institutional resources are used to justify specific practices as heritage. This pattern also resonates with (Tubillejas-Andrés et al., 2026), who found a shared normative core but differentiated actor logics in ICH governance. In the current corpus, the shared repertoire forms the basis for different legitimacy configurations.

The lack of robust mythopoesis findings is also informative for genre interpretation. Nomination forms request more explicit claims regarding continuity, value, function, safeguarding, participation, visibility, and community recognition than extended moral storytelling. Therefore, authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization are more compatible with the communicative task applicants must fulfill. However, this finding should be treated as corpus-specific. The study does not conclude that mythopoesis is not used in UNESCO discourse in general or even in other nomination forms.

5.3 Implications, Scope, and Limitations

Empirically, research demonstrates the benefits of comparing culinary practices based on how they are made institutionally legible and legitimate, not just on their nominated cultural content. The French gastronomic meal, the Mediterranean diet, Turkish coffee, kimjang, and washoku differ materially and historically, but all must demonstrate continuity, social relevance, bearers, cultural value, and reasons for safeguarding. This shared communicative task creates a controlled basis for comparison.

Methodologically, sequencing corpus-led discovery and concordance-led theory-informed coding help mitigate the risk of theory-driven example selection. Corpus procedures highlight recurrent resources and cross-case contrasts before legitimization categories are applied. Conversely, concordance reading prevents frequency from being mechanically converted into discourse meaning. The findings of genre effects also demonstrate why section-sensitive analysis is necessary: the concentration of safeguarding or participation vocabulary cannot be directly interpreted as cultural preference because the form itself requires such topics. This is in line with (Bortolotto et al., 2020), who showed how community participation in UNESCO ICH translates into bureaucratic evidence requirements.

Analytically, the study does not propose new categories for van Leeuwen. A more modest contribution is demonstrating the analytical value of reading legitimacy as

configurations, not simply presence/absence or category counts. Authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization appear in all cases, but the sources of authority, valued social goods, and rationalized benefits differ. The configuration approach therefore helps maintain cultural differentiation within a shared institutional repertoire.

Sustainability also demonstrates the importance of case-sensitive interpretation. Ecological rationalization is strong in Washoku and present in different forms in Kimjang, but it is not the organizing principle of the entire corpus. This pattern is consistent with (Zocchi et al., 2021) and (Ossowska et al., 2024), which show that the relationship between food heritage and sustainability is multidimensional and not always dominated by environmental objectives. These findings also prevent analysis from adopting a linear narrative that assumes a universal transition from tradition to sustainability.

The research scope remains limited. The corpus consists of five purposefully selected nominations and does not represent all UNESCO culinary heritage entries. Official English-language versions also do not all have the same original-language status. Translation sensitivity indicates a very stable lexical ranking, but the test does not eliminate all possible translation effects on stylistic choice or finer-grained collocation. Furthermore, the nomination form itself shapes what States Parties should talk about. This institutional prompting is both a limitation and part of the phenomenon under study.

Future research could expand the corpus in a controlled manner without losing genre comparability, comparing original-language and official translation versions, or following legitimacy claims along the institutional chain from nomination text to Evaluation Body assessment and Committee decision. Such comparisons could test whether the arguments put forward by States are maintained, modified, or rejected at subsequent institutional stages.

From a methodological perspective, section-conditioned distributions suggest that genre structure should be treated as analytical context, not noise that can be completely “removed.” Removing UNESCO prompts prevented direct lexical contamination, but State Party responses were still produced as answers to institutional questions. Therefore, the convergence found is likely the result of an interaction between common prompting architecture and strategic/cultural choices in the responses. An R1-only robustness check helps demonstrate that case differences persist under stronger genre controls, but it does not completely separate “institutional” from “cultural” language. The study, in fact, rejects this simple separation and views nomination discourse as the place where the two meet.

In this sense, institutional convergence without discursive uniformity is not a claim that UNESCO merely standardizes language or that States are completely free to articulate culture. It points to a relationship: institutional categories delimit the field of justificatory possibilities, while applicants select, emphasize, and combine resources within that field. The concept of configuration is useful because it keeps both levels in view.

6. Conclusion

This study uses comparative corpus-assisted discourse analysis and a discursive legitimacy framework to examine five UNESCO culinary heritage nominations. The results show that all five texts employ a shared lexical-semantic repertoire that includes community, tradition, transmission, knowledge, family, sharing, identity, nature, and related heritage values. This repertoire primarily embodies authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization, while mythopoesis is not robustly identified as an independent strategy.

The findings answer RQ1 by demonstrating recurring institutional resources used to construct heritage value. RQ2 is answered through the identification of three robust modes of legitimation and their contextual realizations. RQ3 shows that convergence occurs primarily in the available repertoire, while divergence arises in how these resources are configured. Heritage legitimacy in the corpus is therefore not constructed by isolated keywords, but through the relationship between authority, valued social meanings, and functional justification.

The research's empirical contribution lies in its controlled comparison of contrasting culinary nominations within the same institutional genre. Its methodological contribution lies in the sequence of corpus-led discovery before theory-informed concordance coding, while its analytical contribution demonstrates the value of reading legitimacy as a configuration, rather than as a count of separate categories. These findings support the interpretation of institutional convergence without discursive uniformity.

However, the study's conclusions are limited by the small purposive corpus, the status of the translation, and institutional prompting. Future research could expand the corpus, compare original-language nominations and officially translated versions, or trace legitimacy claims through UNESCO's institutional stages. Despite these limitations, the study suggests that nomination discourse provides a shared discursive architecture that allows culturally distinct foodways to be translated, justified, and legitimized as ICH.

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