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POETIC HERITAGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE RECONSTRUCTING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION ALONG THE TANG POETRY ROAD IN EASTERN ZHEJIANG — A CASE STUDY OF SHAOXING

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Abstract: This paper examines the digital reconstruction of linear cultural heritage in the digital age, focusing on the Tang Poetry Road in Eastern Zhejiang as a representative case and taking Shaoxing as its core study area. It explores the challenges of cross-cultural communication and proposes digital pathways to address them. The study highlights that the landscape along the Poetry Road embodies profound Shan Shui aesthetics and a hermetic cultural tradition, which constitutes a high-context form of expression that creates a "semantic gap" for international visitors. Current tourism development in Shaoxing remains fragmented and reliant on static displays, failing to convey the emotional and historical layers of the heritage. To bridge this gap, the paper advocates for Digital Cultural Tourism (DCT) as a mediating mechanism. It proposes the construction of a unified "Cloud Tang Poetry Road" platform, supported by immersive VR/AR technologies to visualize poetic imagery and reconstruct cultural scenes. Additionally, a "Tang Poetry+" model is introduced to integrate poetic elements into lifestyle experiences such as gastronomy and lodging, thereby enhancing engagement and comprehension among cross-cultural audiences. The research argues that digital technology functions not merely as a tool but as a vital "cultural translator," capable of transforming the Tang Poetry Road from a physical route into an interactive digital-cultural space that facilitates intercultural dialogue and global resonance.

Keywords: Tang Poetry Road in Eastern Zhejiang; Cross-cultural communication; Digital cultural tourism; Shaoxing

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Renaissance of Linear Cultural Heritage

The concept of "Linear Cultural Heritage" has emerged as a significant paradigm in global tourism, shifting the focus from isolated scenic spots to interconnected cultural corridors. Among these, the "Tang Poetry Road in Eastern Zhejiang" (Zhedong Tang Poetry Road) stands as a unique specimen of literary geography. It is not merely a physical route but a cultural phenomenon formed during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), where poets traveled from the Qiantang River, through the mirror-like waters of Shaoxing (Yuezhou), to the mystical peaks of Mt. Tiantai. Historical records indicate that over 450 poets, including iconic figures like Li Bai and Du Fu, traversed this route, leaving behind more than 1,500 poems that celebrate the region's landscape and spiritual depth.

In the post-pandemic era, there has been a resurgence of interest in this heritage. The Zhejiang provincial government has elevated the "Tang Poetry Road" to a strategic cultural belt, aiming to transform these historical footprints into a "Golden Tourism Belt". As the core region of this road, Shaoxing holds a central position, possessing over 1,000 relevant poems and key heritage sites such as Mirror Lake (Jianhu) and Mt. Kuaiji [1]. This revival represents a shift from traditional sightseeing to a form of "cultural pilgrimage," where tourists seek to retrace the steps of ancient literati and engage with the landscape through the lens of classical literature.

1.2 The Cross-Cultural Dilemma

Despite its rich historical endowment, the Tang Poetry Road faces a critical challenge in modern tourism: the disconnect between the physical landscape and its cultural signification, particularly for cross-cultural audiences. The aesthetic appreciation of "Shan Shui" (mountains and waters) in Tang poetry is deeply rooted in a high-context culture, relying heavily on historical allusions, Taoist philosophy, and the "hermit tradition" prevalent in Eastern Zhejiang. For international tourists or those lacking specific cultural literacy, the physical sites—such as the Orchid Pavilion (Lanting) or the Ruoye Stream—often appear as mere natural sceneries, devoid of their profound "poetic soul". Current tourism development in Shaoxing has largely relied on static displays in museums or simple sightseeing boats, which fail to communicate the complex emotional and historical narratives embedded in the sites [2]. This "semantic gap" hinders the transformation of heritage resources into a universally understandable tourism experience, limiting the road's potential as a medium for intercultural exchange.

1.3 Digital Cultural Tourism as a Mediator

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To bridge this gap, Digital Cultural Tourism (DCT) offers a transformative solution. By leveraging technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Cloud Computing, DCT can decode the "invisible" cultural layers of the Tang Poetry Road and render them accessible to a global audience. Recent initiatives in Shaoxing, such as the "Cloud Tang Poetry Road" and the "Digital Poem Road e-Station," demonstrate the potential of digitizing heritage resources to create immersive, interactive experiences.

This study argues that digital technology is not merely a marketing tool but a vital "cultural translator" that reconfigures the relationship between the tourist and the heritage site [3]. Focusing on Shaoxing as a case study, this paper addresses the following research questions:1.Spatial Distribution: How is the poetic heritage of the Tang Poetry Road spatially clustered within the cultural geography of Shaoxing? 2.Current Limitations: What are the structural and communicative barriers in the current traditional development of this linear heritage? 3.Digital Reconfiguration: How can digital strategies, specifically VR/AR and cloud-based platforms, reconstruct the "poetic experience" to facilitate effective cross-cultural communication?By answering these questions, this research contributes to the theoretical understanding of how digital mediation can revitalize linear cultural heritage, turning a historical route into a dynamic space for cross-cultural dialogue.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Conceptualization and Spatiality of the "Tang Poetry Road"

The "Tang Poetry Road in Eastern Zhejiang" (Zhedong Tang Poetry Road) is a cultural geography concept first proposed by scholars in the early 1990s to describe the travel routes taken by poets during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD). It is not a single administrative road but a linear cultural heritage network formed by the poets' trajectories. Spatially, this route centers on the "Cao'e River — Robert Stream (Shanxi) — Tiantai Mt." axis. Historically, poets typically embarked from Xixing (crossing the Qiantang River), traveled through Shaoxing (Yuezhou), navigated the Mirror Lake (Jianhu) and Ruoye Stream, and ascended the Cao'e River to reach the spiritual summits of Mt. Tiantai orical records indicate that over 450 poets, representing approximately one-fifth of all recorded poets in the Complete Tang Poems (Quan Tang Shi), traversed this region, leaving behind more than 1,500 poems. This high concentration of literary production has led scholars to define it as a unique "landscape-literary corridor" that rivals the Silk Road in cultural significance.

2.2 Historical Drivers

The formation of this poetry road was driven by a confluence of political, economic, and spiritual factors.

2.2.1 Political migration

The "Yongjia Rebellion" and later the "An Lushan Rebellion" forced northern elites to migrate southward. Shaoxing (historically Kuaiji/Yuezhou) became a sanctuary for the northern gentry, facilitating a fusion of central plains culture with local Yue culture. Prominent clans like the Wang and Xie families settled here, establishing a cultural foundation that Tang poets later sought to emulate . "Grotto-Heavens" (Dongtian) sacred to Taoism and was the birthplace of the Tiantai sect of Buddhism. Poets like Li Bai and Bai Juyi were drawn to the region not just for sightseeing but for spiritual cultivation (seeking immortality or Zen enlightenment).

2.2.2 The hermit ideal

The landscape of Eastern Zhejiang became a physical manifestation of the "Hermit" (Yinyi) ideal. Disillusioned officials sought solace in its mountains, following the footsteps of predecessors like Xie Lingyun, thereby cementing the route as a path for spiritual exile and poetic reflection.

2.3 The Gap in Current Research

From "Static Preservation" to "Digital Activation" While extensive research has mapped the historical and literary dimensions of the Tang Poetry Road, current scholarship and tourism practices reveal significant gaps in effective dissemination, particularly for cross-cultural audiences.

Existing tourism development in Shaoxing often treats heritage sites (e.g., King Yue's Terrace, Orchid Pavilion) as isolated scenic spots. There is a lack of a unified narrative that connects these fragmented sites through the "red thread" of poetry.

Although local authorities have initiated plans for a "Cloud Tang Poetry Road" involving VR/AR technologies, the implementation remains nascent. Current digital applications are largely restricted to basic surveillance or ticketing systems, failing to utilize digital tools for deep cultural decoding.

Most studies focus on domestic tourists. There is a scarcity of research addressing how high-context Tang poetry can be translated for international tourists who lack the background to understand the symbolic meaning of "Shan Shui" (Mountain-Water) beyond its visual beauty.

This study aims to fill these gaps by proposing a digital-mediated framework that transforms static heritage preservation into dynamic, intercultural communication.

3 THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF SHAOXING'S TANG POETRY ROAD

3.1 Spatial Distribution of Poetic Heritage

The cultural geography of the Tang Poetry Road is not uniformly distributed; rather, it exhibits a distinct core-periphery structure with Shaoxing (historically Yuezhou) serving as the undisputed nucleus. As the administrative seat of the Zhedong Observation Commission during the Tang Dynasty, Yuezhou was the political and cultural center of the region. Analysis of the spatial distribution of literary resources reveals that Shaoxing accounts for more than half of the critical nodes along the entire poetry road [4]. Among the extant Tang poems associated with the route, approximately 1,000 are explicitly linked to the Shaoxing region, constituting a significant majority of the total corpus. This high density of literary production transforms the city from a mere geographical transit point into a dense "cultural container," where historical memory and landscape are inextricably partial.

Within this core region, the distribution of poetic attention clusters around specific hydro-geological features. Statistical analysis of historical texts indicates a pronounced preference for water systems and specific mountain ranges. Mirror Lake (Jianhu), described as the "mother lake" of Shaoxing, stands out as the primary locus of poetic creation, with approximately 192 poems dedicated to its scenery and the surrounding areas. This is followed closely by the Ruoye Stream and Mt. Kuaiji, forming a "golden triangle" of literary heritage. The poets' trajectories typically followed a water-land network: entering via the Zhedong Canal, traversing Mirror Lake, ascending the Ruoye Stream, and eventually reaching the spiritual highlands of Mt. Tianmu (Tianmu Cen) and Mt. Tiantai. This spatial continuity provided the physical infrastructure for the "wandering" (manyou) culture prevalent among Tang literati, allowing for a seamless integration of travel, social exchange, and artistic creation.

3.2 The Semiotics of Landscape

Decoding the "Poetic Heart" For the purpose of cross-cultural communication, it is crucial to recognize that the landscape of Shaoxing is not merely physical nature but a semiotic system encoded with specific cultural meanings. The mountains and waters of Shaoxing function as symbols for distinct philosophical and emotional states, which the poets of the Tang Dynasty sought to inhabit and express.

3.2.1 The mountains

Symbols of Transcendence and Aspiration Mt. Tianmu (Tianmu Cen) represents the zenith of the romantic imagination in Tang poetry. It is immortalized in Li Bai's masterpiece, Dream of the Skyland: A Farewell, where the mountain is depicted not as a geological entity but as a bridge to the celestial realm, "connecting to the heavens" and surpassing the Five Great Mountains of China in grandeur. For international tourists, understanding Mt. Tianmu requires decoding it as a symbol of the "Dreamscape"—a manifestation of the poet's desire to transcend political frustration and seek spiritual liberation through Taoist fantasy [5]. Similarly, Mt. Kuaiji serves as a dual symbol of imperial power and cultural heritage. It is the site of Yu the Great's mausoleum and the legendary location where he gathered feudal lords, imbuing the mountain with a sense of sacred history and statecraft. When poets like Li Bai visited Mt. Kuaiji, they were engaging in a dialogue with these historical layers, viewing the landscape through the lens of antiquity and reverence.

3.2.2 The waters

Symbols of Seclusion and Aesthetics In contrast to the majestic mountains, the water systems of Shaoxing—specifically Mirror Lake and Ruoye Stream—encode themes of seclusion (Yinyi) and pastoral idealism. Mirror Lake, with its expansive and clear waters, was frequently celebrated as a sanctuary for retired officials and scholars. He Zhizhang, a prominent poet and native of Shaoxing, famously requested Mirror Lake as his retirement estate from the Emperor, cementing the lake's status as the ultimate symbol of returning to one's roots and escaping worldly strife. Ruoye Stream complements this with its association with feminine beauty and historical romance, most notably the legend of Xi Shi, one of ancient China's four beauties, who is said to have washed silk in its waters. Poems by Cui Hao and Li Bai describe the stream as a realm of tranquility and "clouds and forests," emphasizing its function as a retreat for the weary soul

Furthermore, the landscape is textually layered with the legacy of the Wei and Jin dynasties, particularly through the Orchid Pavilion (Lanting). The site is not just a garden but the locus of the "Scholarly Spirit," defined by Wang Xizhi's gathering in 353 AD [6]. The act of "floating wine cups along the winding stream" (Qu Shui Liu Shang) became a ritualized motif in Tang poetry, representing the ideal of literary camaraderie and existential reflection. Consequently, the "Tang Poetry Road" in Shaoxing is a palimpsest where Tang poets inscribed their emotions onto the physical traces of their predecessors. For modern tourism, this means that the value of the landscape is invisible to the naked eye; it exists in the intertextual relationships between the scenery and the literature it inspired. Without the aid of interpretive tools to decode these semiotic layers—explaining why a stream signifies "seclusion" or a mountain signifies "dream"—the cross-cultural transmission of this heritage remains superficial.

4 CHALLENGES IN CURRENT CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

4.1 The Fragmentation of Heritage Narratives

Despite the theoretical recognition of the "Tang Poetry Road" as a unified cultural corridor, the practical development of its tourism resources remains significantly fragmented. A primary structural obstacle is the administrative

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compartmentalization of heritage management. Current investigations reveal that the districts within Shaoxing—such as Xinchang, Shengzhou, Yuecheng, Keqiao, and Shangyu—often operate in isolation, lacking a coordinated systemic planning approach. For instance, while Xinchang and Shengzhou have made substantial progress in theming their destinations around Tang poetry, other districts like Yuecheng and Keqiao remain largely focused on basic research and protection rather than integrated tourism development [7]. This "siloed" development model results in a disjointed visitor experience where the "pearls" of heritage sites are scattered across the landscape without being effectively strung into a coherent "chain" of cultural meaning.

Furthermore, market-driven representations of the heritage exacerbate this fragmentation. An analysis of major online travel agencies (OTAs) and digital platforms indicates that existing tourism routes are predominantly clustered around modern literary figures (such as Lu Xun) or general sightseeing spots like the East Lake and Shen Garden. The specific itinerary of the "Tang Poetry Road" is notably absent or marginalized in mainstream commercial routes. Consequently, tourists are presented with isolated scenic spots devoid of their connecting poetic context. They may visit the physical location of the Ruoye Stream or Mt. Kuaiji, but without a unified narrative guide, they fail to perceive the "invisible" linear heritage that binds these sites together. For cross-cultural audiences, this lack of spatial and narrative continuity makes it nearly impossible to reconstruct the historical "wandering" experience of the Tang poets, reducing a profound cultural pilgrimage to a series of unrelated sightseeing stops.

4.2 The "Static Display" Limitation

Beyond spatial fragmentation, the mode of cultural presentation in Shaoxing suffers from a "static" and "planar" approach that is ill-suited for cross-cultural transmission. Current utilization of cultural resources, particularly regarding historical figures and their residences, relies heavily on traditional exhibition methods such as static biographies, photographs, and flat displays. This pedagogical style prioritizes the transmission of factual information over experiential engagement, failing to trigger the emotional or aesthetic resonance necessary for understanding high-context Tang poetry. For example, exhibitions often present the life history of a poet like He Zhizhang or Wang Xizhi but lack the audio-visual or immersive media required to bring their calligraphic or poetic works to life for a contemporary audience.

While there has been a push towards "smart tourism," the current digital infrastructure is largely functional rather than interpretative. Recent reports indicate that while Shaoxing has achieved a 100% access rate for monitoring and information services in major scenic spots, the application of advanced digital technologies for cultural interpretation remains in its infancy [8]. The digitalization efforts are predominantly focused on surveillance, ticketing, and basic data connectivity, rather than deploying Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), or Artificial Intelligence (AI) to decode cultural meanings. This technological gap is critical. Without immersive digital mediation to visualize the "dreamscapes" of Li Bai or the "seclusion" of the Orchid Pavilion, international tourists are left confronting a "high-context" wall. They see the physical artifacts but are denied access to the "poetic soul" that resides in the historical imagination, rendering the deep cultural value of the Tang Poetry Road inaccessible.

5 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: DIGITAL MEDIATION AND CROSS-CULTURAL RECONFIGURATION

5.1 Constructing the "Cloud Tang Poetry Road"

A Digital Infrastructure To overcome the limitations of physical fragmentation and static display, Shaoxing must transition from traditional resource management to a digitized ecosystem. This involves the strategic construction of the "Cloud Tang Poetry Road" (Cloud-based Tang Poetry Road), a concept explicitly proposed in Shaoxing's recent cultural planning. This digital infrastructure aims to integrate the resources of libraries, museums, and scenic spots into a unified cloud platform, utilizing 5G, AI, and Big Data technologies. By digitizing the "Five Roads" framework—which currently encompasses aerial, mountain, land, and water routes—the "Cloud Road" acts as a fifth dimension that transcends physical constraints.

For cross-cultural communication, this cloud-based approach allows for the creation of a "Digital Poem Road e-Station". This platform functions as a virtual gateway where international audiences can access the heritage remotely, engaging with "Sound Museums" and "Cloud Libraries" before or during their visit. By aggregating scattered cultural data—such as the 1,500 poems and the trajectories of 451 poets—into a cohesive digital map, the cloud platform provides the necessary context that is often missing from the physical site, effectively curating the "invisible" literary heritage into a visible digital footprint.5.2 Future Directions

As digital technologies and globalization continue to evolve, the international dissemination of Chinese culture will witness further innovation and transformation. The success of Black Myth Wukong sets a benchmark for the global promotion of Chinese cultural products. However, broader exploration is needed across other media. For instance, comparative studies of games like Genshin Impact could reveal diverse strategies for cross-cultural adaptation. Additionally, research should extend beyond gaming to include film, animation, and virtual reality, analyzing their synergistic roles in cultural dissemination [9]. The digital age presents unprecedented opportunities and challenges for cultural transmission. Future research could investigate how cutting-edge technologies—such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI)—can enhance immersive and interactive cultural experiences. For example, VR reconstructions of Chinese heritage sites could allow global audiences to engage with cultural artifacts in unprecedented ways. Furthermore, leveraging social media and short-video platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube) for

targeted, high-impact campaigns remains a critical area for exploration. Future efforts should focus on constructing a cohesive global communication system that integrates gaming, film, tourism, and education under a unified cultural strategy. Tailored approaches for different regions, informed by local cultural preferences, could foster a "diverse yet harmonious" model of global cultural exchange. For instance, blending localized visual symbols with Chinese cultural essence in game design could enhance cross-cultural resonance.

5.2 Immersive Technologies for Cultural Translation (VR/AR)

The core challenge of communicating Tang poetry to non-Chinese speakers lies in the "high-context" nature of its imagery. Digital cultural tourism addresses this through immersive technologies that function as semiotic translators. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can convert abstract poetic sentiments into embodied visual experiences.

Li Bai's Dream of the Skyland: A Farewell (Meng You Tian Mu Yin Liu Bie) is a seminal text associated with Mt. Tianmu. The surreal imagery in the poem—"The moon mirrors my shadow on the lake," "Rainbows as clothes, winds as horses"—is difficult to visualize through text alone for those unfamiliar with Daoist mythology. Research suggests using VR technology to reconstruct these "dreamscapes," allowing tourists to virtually ascend the "Cloud Staircase" (Qing Yun Ti) and visualize the "celestial realm" described by the poet. This transforms the poem from a textual artifact into a spatial environment that can be navigated and experienced[10].

At the Orchid Pavilion (Lanting), AR technology can overlay historical scenes onto the modern landscape. By scanning specific markers, tourists could witness a digital reenactment of the famous gathering of 353 AD, seeing the "Floating Wine Cup" (Qu Shui Liu Shang) ritual superimposed on the actual stream. This creates a "palimpsest" effect, where the past and present coexist, allowing international visitors to understand the historical gravity of the site without needing extensive textual explanation.

Gamification and the "Tang Poetry+" Model Beyond visual immersion, cross-cultural understanding is enhanced through embodied experiences that engage multiple senses. The "Tang Poetry+" model proposes integrating poetry into lifestyle activities such as gastronomy and lodging, effectively gamifying the cultural experience.

Gastronomy as Cultural Language: The "Tang Poetry Banquet" (Tianmu Tang Poetry Banquet) exemplifies how food can serve as a medium for cultural transmission. Dishes are named after famous poetic lines, converting literary metaphors into edible forms. For instance, a steamed fish dish is named "This Journey is Not for Bass" (referencing Li Bai's poem about homesickness), and a noodle dish is playfully named "Flying Down Three Thousand Feet" (referencing Li Bai's description of a waterfall). For international tourists, this provides a tangible entry point into the literature; decoding the menu becomes a game of cultural discovery, where the taste and presentation of the food narrate the story of the poem.

6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

The Tang Poetry Road as a Digital Cultural Space This study redefines the "Tang Poetry Road in Eastern Zhejiang" not merely as a linear heritage route but as a dynamic "Digital Cultural Space" where historical memory and contemporary technology converge. The research demonstrates that the traditional "static preservation" model is insufficient for mediating the high-context cultural semantics of Tang poetry to a cross-cultural audience. By integrating the specific case of Shaoxing, the study confirms that the "Tang Poetry Road" is a unique cultural corridor formed by the movement of over 450 poets. However, its value remains latent without active interpretation.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the discourse on Digital Mediation in Heritage Tourism. It argues that digital technologies (VR, AR, Cloud platforms) serve as essential "decoding mechanisms" that transform the invisible "poetic soul" of the landscape into visible, experiential realities. This bridges the gap between the physical site (e.g., a mountain) and its literary significance (e.g., a symbol of Taoist transcendence), thereby reconfiguring the heritage from a passive object of the "tourist gaze" into an interactive medium for intercultural dialogue.

6.2 Managerial Implications for Heritage Practice

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest a paradigm shift for destination management organizations (DMOs) in Shaoxing and similar heritage sites.

From "Siloed" Management to Unified Branding: The current development of the Tang Poetry Road suffers from administrative fragmentation, where districts like Xinchang and Shengzhou operate independently. To build a coherent international brand, Shaoxing must adopt a systemic approach, integrating resources across the "Five Roads" (Aerial, Mountain, Land, Water, and Cloud) framework. A unified digital platform is crucial to stitch these fragmented narratives into a seamless cultural journey.

From Resource Protection to "Digital Activation": Protection alone does not generate cross-cultural understanding. Managers must prioritize "activation" through the "Tang Poetry+" model. This involves embedding poetry into tangible experiences, such as the "Tang Poetry Banquet" (gastronomy) and thematic homestays (lodging). By gamifying these experiences—such as simulating the "Floating Wine Cup" ritual at Lanting —managers can lower the cultural entry barrier for international tourists, fostering an environment of active participation rather than passive observation.

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Leveraging the "Cloud" for Global Reach: The construction of the "Cloud Tang Poetry Road" utilizing 5G and AI is critical for overcoming physical limitations. This digital infrastructure should not be limited to domestic audiences but must be tailored for international outreach, functioning as a "Digital Poem Road e-Station" that allows global users to access the heritage remotely, thereby cultivating potential interest before physical travel occurs.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study outlines a strategic framework for digital reconfiguration, it acknowledges certain limitations. The digital construction in Shaoxing is currently in its nascent stage, with many proposed projects like the "Cloud Road" still under development. Consequently, empirical data on the long-term efficacy of these specific digital tools on international tourist behavior is limited.

Conducting empirical studies (e.g., surveys or eye-tracking experiments) to measure how international tourists cognitively process VR-reconstructed poetic scenes compared to traditional text-based guides.

Interdisciplinary Talent Development: The successful implementation of "Tang Poetry+" requires a hybrid workforce proficient in both classical Chinese literature and digital technology. Future studies could explore educational curricula or professional training models necessary to support this niche sector.

Sustainable Digital Ecosystems: Investigating the long-term economic sustainability of digital heritage projects to ensure they do not become obsolete as technology evolves.

In conclusion, the "Tang Poetry Road" possesses the potential to become a world-class example of literary tourism. By embracing digital mediation, Shaoxing can transform this ancient route into a modern bridge for cross-cultural communication, ensuring that the voices of the Tang poets resonate with a global audience in the digital age.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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