How Immigrant Home Interpreted as Heritage in China

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how the immigrant home was interpreted as heritage by stakeholders such as experts, tour guide and government officers, to explore the relationship of home and nation in Chinese culture. Diaolou, the defensive tower style house in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province, Southern China, is used as study area. The area was ravaged by the Taiping rebellion of 1851-1864 after the First Opium War, Kaiping experienced significant civil unrest marked by violent crime, banditry, and civil disruption. Local people started to emigrated mainly to USA and Canada as railway building labor in late nineteenth century. The migrant repatriated their earnings to build their home with defensive function to protect their family in the war time, and the design and decoration of the Diaolou is a combination of Chinese and Western style with function of living and defense, it was listed as world cultural heritage in 2007 and currently becomes a tourist destination.

Participant observation and interview methods are used for data collection and secondary data were also collected as supplementary. The findings are: (1) the experts mainly interpreted the immigrant home as the witness of history and the carrier of architect art; (2) the local government tries to interpret the immigrant home as tool of national identity and patriotism education(3) the tour guide intends to interpret the immigrant home as function of living and defense, to construct the immigrant identity and the story of history. The paper concludes that the immigrant home was interpreted as heritage with storytelling of nation identity and history witness, more than home of immigrant, the home and nation relationship of Chinese traditional culture was discussed at the end of the paper.

Key words: immigrant heritage; home; nation; tourism; interpretation