

# Research on the Origin and Value Analysis of Kaiping Diaolou, a World Cultural Heritage Site

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the origins and cultural value of Kaiping Diaolou, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site. By combining literature analysis with field investigations, the research delves deeply into the historical background and architectural characteristics of the Diaolou. The findings reveal that Kaiping Diaolou integrates both Chinese and Western architectural styles, reflecting the unique regional culture and the historical significance of ethnic fusion. Kaiping Diaolou is not only a symbol of overseas Chinese culture but also a model of Sino-Western cultural integration, embodying rich historical connotations and profound social significance. This study provides a critical basis for the preservation and inheritance of this heritage. Moreover, the defensive function of the Diaolou, along with its social symbolic meaning within the local community, further highlights its important status in global cultural heritage.

## KEYWORDS

World Cultural Heritage; Kaiping Diaolou; Origin; Value.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Research Background and Significance

As a significant representative of World Cultural Heritage, Kaiping Diaolou possesses a profound historical background and unique cultural value. The formation and development of Kaiping Diaolou are closely linked to modern Chinese history and reflect the integration of overseas Chinese culture with both Chinese and Western influences. The architectural style of the Diaolou is distinctive, blending traditional Chinese and Western architectural elements, serving as a crucial cultural artifact of the overseas Chinese community's cultural identity and dissemination during a specific historical period. In recent years, with the growing awareness of cultural heritage preservation, the study of Kaiping Diaolou has gradually attracted academic and public attention. However, existing research has primarily focused on the architectural style of the Diaolou and the historical background of the overseas Chinese, with relatively limited exploration of the origins of the Diaolou. Therefore, an in-depth investigation into the origins and cultural value of Kaiping Diaolou holds significant academic and practical importance for understanding the uniqueness and global significance of this cultural heritage. Furthermore, examining the social symbolic meaning and historical value of the Diaolou as a defensive structure can enhance the level of cultural heritage preservation and utilization, providing valuable insights for the study of other cultural heritage sites.

## **1.2. Research Methods**

This research will employ a combination of literature analysis and field investigation to systematically study the historical background, architectural characteristics, and cultural integration aspects of Kaiping Diaolou. The literature analysis will primarily involve reviewing existing academic research, exploring the origins, developmental history, and cultural background of the Diaolou. The field investigation will focus on observing and documenting the architectural forms, structural features, and decorative styles of Kaiping Diaolou to further analyze its cultural significance and symbolic role within the local community. By adopting a multi-angle, multi-layered research approach, this study aims to provide a scientific basis for the preservation and transmission of Kaiping Diaolou and offer reference for related cultural heritage research and preservation efforts.

## **1.3. Research Innovations**

### **1.3.1. In-Depth Exploration of the Origins of Kaiping Diaolou**

This study will conduct an in-depth exploration of the origins of Kaiping Diaolou by systematically reviewing and analyzing existing historical literature, conducting field investigations, and gathering oral histories. Unlike previous research, this study will not only focus on the architectural features of the Diaolou but will also examine the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which they were formed. Specifically, the study will emphasize the early developmental history of the Diaolou and its relationship with the traditional defensive architecture of southern China.

### **1.3.2. Multi-Angle Analysis of the Cultural Value of Kaiping Diaolou**

In contrast to previous studies that primarily focused on the analysis of architectural forms, this research will provide a comprehensive analysis of the cultural value of Kaiping Diaolou from multiple perspectives[1]. First, the study will explore the social functions of the Diaolou, particularly its symbolic significance within the local community and its impact on community structure and cultural identity. Second, the research will delve into the overseas Chinese cultural connotations embedded within the Diaolou, revealing its role as a vehicle for cultural exchange and integration in the process of globalization[2]. Lastly, the study will systematically analyze the evolution of the cultural value of the Diaolou in conjunction with its historical background, aiming to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its unique significance as a cultural heritage site.

### **1.3.3. Introduction of New Research Perspectives and Methods**

This study will introduce new research perspectives and methods to expand the depth and breadth of research on Kaiping Diaolou. First, the research will incorporate theories and methods from multiple disciplines, such as sociology and cultural anthropology, to conduct interdisciplinary analysis on the social functions and cultural significance of the Diaolou. Additionally, the study will adopt a comparative research approach, comparing Kaiping Diaolou with other similar cultural heritage sites. This approach aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the unique value of the Diaolou within the broader context of global cultural heritage preservation.

## **2. CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS**

### **2.1. Current State of Research**

#### **2.1.1. Research on the Historical Background of Kaiping Diaolou**

The historical background of Kaiping Diaolou has been extensively studied in the academic community. Research has primarily focused on the origins and developmental evolution of the Diaolou, where scholars have analyzed the construction dates, usage functions, and their connections to the historical context of overseas Chinese. These studies have explored the reasons behind the

formation and development trajectory of the Diaolou[3]. In recent years, research on the relationship between Kaiping Diaolou and the socio-political changes in modern Chinese society has increased, particularly in relation to the overseas Chinese migration waves and changes in the political environment, enriching the understanding of the Diaolou's historical background[2]. Additionally, some scholars have concentrated on the cultural influence of Kaiping Diaolou and its global significance as a World Cultural Heritage site. These scholars often approach the subject from the perspectives of cultural heritage preservation and cultural exchange, exploring the uniqueness and universality of the Diaolou within the global cultural heritage system[4].

### 2.1.2. Research on the Architectural Style of Kaiping Diaolou

The architectural style of Kaiping Diaolou, known for its unique blend of Chinese and Western elements, has become a significant focus in the field of architecture. Scholars have primarily explored the forms, materials, and decorative styles of the Diaolou, analyzing how the integration of traditional Chinese architecture with Western elements led to the creation of a distinctive architectural style. These studies have not only revealed the diversity in the architectural forms of the Diaolou but also explored the technological advancements in architecture during specific historical conditions[5][6]. Furthermore, some researchers have focused on positioning Kaiping Diaolou within the global history of architecture, examining how this unique building type reflects the historical process of cultural exchange and integration on a global scale[7].

### 2.1.3. Research on the Relationship between Overseas Chinese Culture and Kaiping Diaolou

Overseas Chinese culture has played a crucial role in the formation and development of Kaiping Diaolou, and this relationship has been widely studied by scholars. Research has often focused on the economic support and cultural influence of the overseas Chinese in the construction of the Diaolou, analyzing how they used the Diaolou as a medium to express their emotions and cultural identity towards their homeland. Additionally, some studies have examined the specific manifestations of overseas Chinese culture in the architectural style and decorations of the Diaolou, uncovering the deeper symbolic significance of the Diaolou as a representation of overseas Chinese culture. Moreover, other scholars have explored the global dissemination of overseas Chinese culture and its contribution to the cultural value of Kaiping Diaolou, emphasizing the cross-cultural exchange significance behind the Diaolou as a product of Sino-Western cultural interaction[8][9].

## 2.2. Limitations of Existing Research

### 2.2.1. Weaknesses in Research on the Origins of the Diaolou

Although scholars have conducted extensive research on the historical background and architectural style of Kaiping Diaolou, the exploration of the origins of the Diaolou remains relatively weak. Existing research primarily focuses on the formation period, architectural features, and connections to overseas Chinese culture, but there has been little detailed exploration of the origins of the Diaolou. For instance, the relationship between the origins of Kaiping Diaolou and the defensive architecture of southern China has not been adequately studied. The early developmental history of the Diaolou and its position within the traditional Chinese architectural system also remain underexplored. Furthermore, the research on the specific social context, political environment, and cultural heritage during the formation of the Diaolou is relatively insufficient, leading to a limited understanding of its origins.

### 2.2.2. Insufficient Research on the Social Symbolic Significance of Kaiping Diaolou

As a defensive structure, the social symbolic significance of Kaiping Diaolou is particularly important. However, existing research mostly focuses on the architectural forms and cultural value of the Diaolou, with relatively little exploration of its social symbolic significance within the local community. The status of the Diaolou within the local community, its significance as a symbol of

community security, and its impact on the social structure and cultural identity of the community have not been fully studied. This lack of research on the social functions and symbolic significance of the Diaolou limits the comprehensive understanding of its cultural value as a heritage site.

### **2.2.3. Limited Integration of Cultural Value and Historical Background Research**

Existing research often separates the discussion of the cultural value of Kaiping Diaolou from its historical background, lacking systematic studies that organically integrate the two. The cultural value of the Diaolou is not only reflected in its architectural style and decorations but is also deeply rooted in its historical background and social environment. However, current studies often analyze the cultural value of the Diaolou independently of its historical context, leading to a fragmented understanding of its overall value. The lack of comprehensive analysis that combines the social functions, cultural connotations, and value changes of the Diaolou across different historical periods limits the depth and breadth of research.

## **2.3. Summary**

Through the analysis of the limitations in existing research, it can be observed that although the study of Kaiping Diaolou as a World Cultural Heritage site has established a certain foundation, there are still significant gaps in exploring its origins, interpreting its social symbolic significance, and integrating its cultural value with its historical background. These issues highlight the necessity and potential for further investigation in this area, while also pointing out directions for future research.

# **3. RESEARCH ON THE ORIGINS OF KAIPING DIAOLOU**

## **3.1. The Historical Background of the Origins of Kaiping Diaolou**

By analyzing the historical development of the Kaiping region, the influence of overseas Chinese on the construction of the Diaolou, and the relationship between social unrest and defensive needs, a better understanding of the historical background and the socio-cultural motivations behind the formation of Kaiping Diaolou can be achieved. These factors collectively contributed to the creation of this unique cultural heritage, which holds an important position in the architectural history of China and the world.

### **3.1.1. Overview of the Historical Development of the Kaiping Region**

Kaiping is located in the western part of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province, China. With its advantageous geographic location and convenient waterway transportation, Kaiping has historically held significant economic and cultural importance. The history of Kaiping can be traced back to the Qin and Han dynasties. Over the course of various dynasties in Chinese history, Kaiping gradually developed into a prosperous town centered on agriculture and handicrafts. Particularly during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Kaiping's economy further expanded, establishing an economic structure supported by grain, handicrafts, and aquatic products. However, after the Opium Wars, with the opening of China's coastal regions, Kaiping's social and economic landscape underwent profound changes. A large population emigrated, especially the overseas Chinese who sought livelihoods abroad, gradually becoming a crucial force in the region's social and economic development[10].

### **3.1.2. The Influence of Overseas Chinese on the Construction of Kaiping Diaolou**

The construction of Kaiping Diaolou is closely related to the rise of the overseas Chinese community. Beginning in the mid-19th century, many people from Kaiping migrated to North America, Southeast Asia, and other regions in search of livelihoods, accumulating wealth through hard work. After achieving economic success, overseas Chinese began to give back to their hometowns. They not only contributed to the development of their hometowns by funding education and building public facilities, but they also actively participated in local construction projects[11]. The construction of Kaiping

Diaolou is one of the significant expressions of this desire to give back. These Diaolou were not merely symbols of wealth and status; more importantly, they served as defensive structures to protect homes in a turbulent social environment. The construction of these Diaolou reflected the deep emotional connection and cultural identity that overseas Chinese felt toward their homeland. Many of the Diaolou exhibit a fusion of Chinese and Western architectural styles, reflecting the modern architectural ideas encountered by the overseas Chinese, while still preserving traditional Chinese architectural elements. This blend makes Kaiping Diaolou a typical example of the fusion of Eastern and Western cultures.

### 3.1.3. The Relationship between Social Unrest and Defensive Needs

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the social environment in Kaiping was fraught with turmoil. During this period, China was transitioning from a feudal society to a modern one, resulting in political instability, rampant banditry, and frequent natural disasters in southern China, leading to a highly unstable social order. To cope with the frequent invasions by bandits and social unrest, defensive structures like the Diaolou emerged[12]. The architectural form and layout of Kaiping Diaolou reflect the urgent need for self-protection among local residents. These Diaolou were typically built on the highest points in villages, with sturdy structures, observation towers on the rooftops, thick walls, and narrow doors and windows designed to prevent external invasions. In times of peace, the Diaolou served as residences and storage facilities for villagers, but in times of crisis, they functioned as defensive fortresses. The widespread construction of these defensive buildings was not only a direct response to the turbulent social conditions but also a manifestation of the collective effort and self-protection consciousness of the local residents when faced with threats.

## 3.2. The Formation of the Architectural Style of Kaiping Diaolou

By analyzing the fusion of Eastern and Western architectural styles, the use of materials and technology, and the regional characteristics in the formation of the architectural style of Kaiping Diaolou, we can gain a better understanding of the unique position these buildings hold in architectural history. These structures are not only a tribute to the homeland by overseas Chinese but also a historical witness to the collision and fusion of Eastern and Western cultures, possessing significant architectural and cultural value.

### 3.2.1. The Fusion of Eastern and Western Architectural Styles

The architectural style of Kaiping Diaolou is a model of Eastern and Western cultural fusion, which was made possible by the experiences of the overseas Chinese community and their deep affection for their homeland. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many people from Kaiping crossed the oceans to North America, Southeast Asia, and other regions to seek livelihoods. As they were exposed to Western architectural styles, they gradually developed a unique aesthetic. When these overseas Chinese successfully returned home, they integrated their overseas experiences into the construction of Diaolou, resulting in a unique blend of Eastern and Western architectural elements.

The exterior design of the Diaolou often combines traditional Chinese architectural elements, such as upturned eaves, brick carvings, and wood carvings, with Western architectural features like arched windows, Roman columns, and Baroque-style decorative patterns[13]. These elements are skillfully combined in the design of the Diaolou, giving each building a unique aesthetic value. For example, some Diaolou have exterior walls adorned with Western-style reliefs, while the interior structure retains traditional Chinese wooden beams and columns, showcasing the deep integration of Eastern and Western architectural techniques and aesthetics. This blend of architectural styles not only reflects the contribution of the overseas Chinese community to the architecture of their homeland but also illustrates the deep cultural fusion between East and West in the Kaiping region during that time[14].

### 3.2.2. The Use of Building Materials and Technology

The construction of Kaiping Diaolou made full use of the advanced building materials and technologies of the time, reflecting the combination of technical experience accumulated by overseas Chinese with local architectural wisdom. In terms of material selection, the Diaolou extensively utilized modern building materials such as cement, steel reinforcement, and red bricks[15]. These materials were primarily sourced from overseas, particularly from countries like the United States and Canada, which significantly enhanced the sturdiness and durability of the Diaolou. Additionally, some Diaolou incorporated advanced anti-seismic and fire-resistant technologies of the time, which were effectively applied in their construction, further perfecting their defensive capabilities.

The design of the Diaolou also took into account the local climate conditions, such as high temperatures, heavy rainfall, and frequent typhoons. Many Diaolou have thick walls that can effectively withstand typhoon impacts, and their roofs are designed with steep slopes to facilitate drainage and moisture resistance. These technological innovations and the careful selection of materials have ensured that the Kaiping Diaolou have stood firm through a century of weathering, making them a marvel in modern architectural history.

### 3.2.3. Regional Characteristics of Diaolou Architecture

The architectural features of Kaiping Diaolou largely reflect the unique geographical and cultural background of the region. These Diaolou are often built on the highest points of villages or along riverbanks, considering both defensive functions and harmonious coexistence with the natural environment. Due to the diverse terrain in Kaiping, the architectural forms of the Diaolou exhibit distinct regional characteristics. In mountainous areas, Diaolou are typically constructed on slopes, taking advantage of the terrain to enhance defensive capabilities. These Diaolou are often compactly arranged and towering, creating a sense of solemnity and majesty. In the plains, Diaolou are designed with a greater focus on harmony with the surrounding environment. Their structures are relatively open, with larger windows to allow for better lighting and ventilation. Diaolou built along rivers are designed with flood prevention in mind, often featuring elevated platforms and drainage systems to protect against flooding.

Additionally, the decorative styles of the Diaolou vary according to the region. In villages heavily influenced by overseas Chinese culture, the decorations are more ornate, incorporating Western decorative arts. In more conservative rural areas, the decorations lean towards traditional, preserving more elements of classical Chinese architecture. These regional characteristics are not only evident in the exterior design of the Diaolou but also in their functional layout and spatial utilization, making each Diaolou a unique part of Kaiping's cultural landscape.

## 3.3. The Cultural Background of the Origins of Kaiping Diaolou

As a unique cultural phenomenon, Kaiping Diaolou not only reflects the characteristics of overseas Chinese culture and ethnic integration but also plays an irreplaceable role in the social structure and cultural life of the local community. The multiple functions and rich connotations of the Diaolou have made them iconic symbols of the historical and cultural heritage of the Kaiping region, occupying an important position in both Chinese architectural history and social history.

### 3.3.1. The Embodiment of Overseas Chinese Culture

Kaiping Diaolou, as symbols of overseas Chinese culture, fully demonstrate the deep emotions and cultural identity that the overseas Chinese community holds towards their homeland. The construction of the Diaolou reflects the hardships faced by overseas Chinese during their time abroad and their desire to give back to their hometowns after achieving success. Overseas Chinese brought back the wealth and knowledge they accumulated abroad to Kaiping, blending Western architectural styles with traditional Chinese culture to create a unique architectural form. These Diaolou are not only

symbols of individual success for the overseas Chinese but also important expressions of the cultural identity of the entire overseas Chinese community.

The decorations and designs of the Kaiping Diaolou often incorporate the nostalgia of the overseas Chinese for their homeland and their commitment to preserving Chinese culture. For instance, many architectural details of the Diaolou feature traditional Chinese symbols, such as dragon and phoenix motifs, and auspicious symbols like the "Fu, Lu, Shou" (happiness, prosperity, and longevity), expressing the overseas Chinese's wishes for family prosperity and the flourishing of their hometown. Additionally, the layout and functional design of the interiors of the Diaolou reflect the overseas Chinese's emphasis on family unity and the welfare of the family. This combination of the traditional concept of family with the experiences gained abroad forms the unique cultural essence of the Kaiping Diaolou.

### 3.3.2. Ethnic Integration and Social Symbolic Significance

Kaiping Diaolou are not only an architectural blend of East and West but also a symbol of ethnic integration. The Kaiping region has long been a place where multiple ethnic groups coexist, and the return of overseas Chinese further deepened this trend of ethnic integration. During the construction of the Diaolou, craftsmen and designers from different cultural backgrounds worked together, leading to the exchange and fusion of diverse cultures. As a result, these Diaolou are not just symbols of individual or family wealth but also represent a multi-ethnic, multicultural community, embodying a cultural heritage created and protected collectively by different ethnic groups throughout history.

In terms of social symbolic significance, Diaolou hold a unique position. Due to the substantial funds and resources required for their construction, families capable of building Diaolou were often regarded as leaders and protectors of the local community. Thus, Diaolou in local communities are not merely defensive structures; they are also symbols of social status and power. They reflect the influence of the family and its voice within the community, becoming an integral part of the local social structure. Through the Diaolou, cultural exchanges among different ethnic groups were strengthened, and the social cohesion of the community was enhanced.

### 3.3.3. The Role of Diaolou in the Local Community

Kaiping Diaolou are significant not only in terms of architectural style and cultural symbolism but also in their multifaceted role in the daily life of the local community. First, as defensive structures, Diaolou provided shelter for local residents during turbulent times. In periods of social unrest, these structures served as fortresses where villagers could seek refuge, playing a crucial role in protecting the lives and property of the residents.

Secondly, Diaolou had important economic functions within the community. Due to their sturdy construction and spacious interiors, many Diaolou were not only used as residences but also served as schools, ancestral halls, pawnshops, or commercial shops. The multifunctionality of these Diaolou greatly contributed to the development and prosperity of the local economy.

Moreover, Diaolou played a vital role in the cultural life of the community. Many Diaolou housed ancestral halls or shrines dedicated to ancestor worship, serving as important venues for family members to conduct rituals. Over time, the construction and use of Diaolou gave rise to a series of unique community traditions and rituals. These cultural activities not only enhanced the cohesion within families but also strengthened cultural ties among community residents.

## 4. CULTURAL VALUE ANALYSIS OF KAIPING DIAOLOU

### 4.1. Architectural Features and Cultural Value

#### 4.1.1. The Architectural Style of East-West Integration and Its Symbolic Significance

Kaiping Diaolou, a unique phenomenon in Chinese architectural history, is renowned for its blend of Eastern and Western architectural styles. These Diaolou are not only products of the fusion between the overseas Chinese experience and their homeland culture but also exemplify cultural integration and innovation. The exterior design of these Diaolou often combines the elegance of traditional Chinese architecture with the grandeur of Western architecture. For instance, many Diaolou maintain the layout of a traditional Chinese siheyuan (courtyard house) while incorporating Western elements such as arches, Roman columns, and relief decorations. This blend of styles reflects the deep emotional connection of the overseas Chinese to their traditional culture, as well as their recognition of Western modern architectural techniques and aesthetics.

These East-West integrated Diaolou symbolize the mutual influence and coexistence of Eastern and Western cultures, reflecting the diversity and openness of the society at the time. The diversity and innovation in the architectural styles of the Diaolou showcase the overseas Chinese community's ability to navigate different cultures and their embrace of multiculturalism. This fusion of architectural styles holds significant symbolic meaning in Chinese architectural history, representing the self-renewal and development of traditional Chinese culture in the context of globalization.

#### 4.1.2. Architectural Layout and Cultural Symbolism

Kaiping Diaolou not only exhibit a blend of Eastern and Western styles in their exterior but also carry deep cultural symbolism in their architectural layout. The layout of the Diaolou typically combines defensive and residential functions, embodying both practicality and cultural significance. For example, the selection of the Diaolou's location often considers Feng Shui principles, emphasizing harmony with the surrounding environment, which reflects the traditional Chinese concept of the unity between heaven and humanity. Diaolou are usually built on the highest points of villages or at key crossroads, allowing them to overlook the entire village and defend against external threats, symbolizing the family's importance and protective role within the community.

Internally, the Diaolou often include multiple functional areas, such as living quarters, storage spaces, and ancestral worship areas. The distribution and design of these spaces not only meet the daily needs of the family but also reflect traditional Chinese family values, such as the hierarchical order and clan consciousness. The presence of ancestral halls or worship spaces further reinforces the symbolic significance of the Diaolou as spiritual fortresses for the family. Through an analysis of the architectural layout, it is evident that the Diaolou are more than just buildings; they are symbols of family culture, identity, and status, with cultural value that far exceeds the physical structure itself.

#### 4.1.3. Decorative Arts and Aesthetic Value

The decorative arts of Kaiping Diaolou are rich and diverse, reflecting the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures while showcasing unique aesthetic value. The decorative styles of the Diaolou are varied, commonly featuring traditional Chinese crafts such as brick carvings, wood carvings, and stone carvings, alongside Western elements like reliefs, stained glass windows, and Baroque-style decorations. These decorative elements not only enhance the visual appeal of the Diaolou but also imbue the buildings with deep cultural significance.

The interior decorations of the Diaolou are often filled with intricate artistic expressions, such as carved doors and windows, exquisite murals, and mosaic-tiled surfaces[15]. These elements demonstrate the aesthetic tastes and artistic cultivation of the building's owners. Many Diaolou also incorporate symbolic elements in their decorations, such as dragons and phoenixes, auspicious clouds, and "Fu, Lu, Shou" (symbols of happiness, prosperity, and longevity), expressing wishes for family

prosperity, safety, and happiness. Meanwhile, Western decorative elements like angels, grapevines, and geometric patterns reflect the owner's worldview and open cultural mindset.

The decorative arts of Kaiping Diaolou not only enrich the visual experience of the architecture but also enhance its cultural and aesthetic value. These decorative details, while reflecting the cultural identity of the overseas Chinese families, also bear witness to the deep exchange and integration of Chinese and Western cultures in the realm of aesthetics. The aesthetic value of the Diaolou lies not only in the artistry of the buildings themselves but also in their creative integration and reinterpretation of different cultural elements, making Kaiping Diaolou vibrant cultural monuments.

## **4.2. Defensive Function and Social Symbolism**

### **4.2.1. Analysis of the Defensive Functions of Diaolou**

The initial purpose of building Kaiping Diaolou was to address the safety threats posed by social unrest and foreign invasions at the time, making their defensive function particularly prominent. The design of the Diaolou incorporates military defensive needs, featuring sturdy structures, thick walls, and tall building forms, all of which provide strong resistance against external enemies[12].

The walls of the Diaolou are typically constructed from solid materials such as stone, brick, and concrete, effectively withstanding firearm attacks. The internal design of staircases and passageways is complex, often with only a narrow entrance passage to facilitate defense in emergency situations. Additionally, Diaolou usually have narrow shooting holes or observation platforms, allowing residents to monitor enemy movements or conduct defensive shooting without exposing themselves. These designs fully consider practical defensive needs, making the Diaolou a solid fortress for villagers to seek refuge during times of war and turmoil. Furthermore, the height of the Diaolou gives it strategic significance. The elevated design allows defenders to overlook the surrounding area, control the terrain, and quickly identify and respond to potential threats. This towering design not only enhances the defensive capabilities of the Diaolou but also makes it a prominent landmark within the village.

### **4.2.2. Social Status of Diaolou in the Community**

In the community of Kaiping, Diaolou are more than just buildings; they hold significant social status. Families capable of constructing Diaolou usually possess substantial economic strength and social standing, making the Diaolou a symbol of their status and power. The number and scale of Diaolou owned by a family often correlate with their influence in the community.

In the community, Diaolou serve not only as defensive structures but also play important social roles. For instance, during major festivals or family celebrations, Diaolou often serve as central venues for events, hosting important ceremonies and gatherings. The ancestral halls and shrines within the Diaolou further reinforce their role in the spiritual life of the family.

Since the construction of a Diaolou requires significant resources and manpower, families that own Diaolou are typically seen as leaders or protectors of the community. They provide not only material protection but also a sense of belonging and security to the community members. Thus, the presence of Diaolou in the community transcends mere architectural significance, becoming an integral part of the local social structure and cultural order.

### **4.2.3. Historical Memory and Cultural Heritage of Diaolou**

As a part of the history of the Kaiping region, Diaolou carry rich historical memories and cultural heritage. The construction and use of Diaolou reflect the social environment and way of life during specific historical periods, making them valuable tangible resources for studying local history and culture. Over time, Diaolou have gradually transformed from defensive structures into cultural heritage, preserving and passing down their historical memories. The historical memory of Diaolou is not only evident in their architectural structures and decorative styles but also in the stories and

legends associated with them. Many Diaolou are tied to rich family histories and legendary tales, which have been preserved and passed down through oral traditions, written records, or visual media. Therefore, Diaolou are not only tangible cultural heritage but also significant carriers of intangible cultural heritage.

In terms of cultural heritage, the protection and restoration of Diaolou have become increasingly important. Through the preservation and exhibition of Diaolou, the local history and culture are passed down and promoted, providing valuable resources for future generations to understand and study this unique architectural form. Kaiping Diaolou hold an important place in China's cultural heritage and have been recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage site, further highlighting their unique value in global culture.

In summary, Kaiping Diaolou, as a distinctive historical architecture, not only demonstrate their strong defensive function but also hold significant social status within the local community. The historical memory and cultural heritage carried by Diaolou make them an indispensable part of Chinese traditional culture, holding irreplaceable historical and cultural value.

### **4.3. Status in Global Cultural Heritage**

#### **4.3.1. Uniqueness and Universality of Kaiping Diaolou**

Kaiping Diaolou, as a unique phenomenon in Chinese architectural history, embodies both uniqueness and universality. The uniqueness of Diaolou is reflected in their architectural style, functional design, and historical background. As a product of the fusion between Chinese and Western cultures, Kaiping Diaolou are distinctive, combining traditional Chinese architecture with Western elements in appearance, while also serving dual purposes of residence and defense. This architectural form is extremely rare both in China and globally, endowing Kaiping Diaolou with unique cultural and historical value.

However, the universality of Kaiping Diaolou should not be overlooked. While the architectural form of Diaolou is unique worldwide, the cultural connotations and historical memories they carry resonate broadly. Diaolou, as symbols of family wealth and social status, reflect universal human concepts of family values, identity, and the desire for security. Additionally, the defensive function and social status of Diaolou within the community share similarities with other architectural forms worldwide, such as European castles and Indian forts. These similarities demonstrate that the status of Kaiping Diaolou in global cultural heritage is not only a reflection of their uniqueness but also their connection to shared human historical experiences.

#### **4.3.2. Comparison with Other World Cultural Heritage**

Comparing Kaiping Diaolou with other world cultural heritage sites helps to better understand their position in global cultural heritage. Kaiping Diaolou share certain functional similarities with European medieval castles, Indian forts, and Middle Eastern defensive structures, all of which were built to counter external invasions and hold significant positions within their communities. However, the unique Sino-Western architectural style of Kaiping Diaolou makes them stand out among these structures, creating a distinct architectural type. In comparison with other world cultural heritage sites, Kaiping Diaolou also exhibit characteristics of cultural integration. Unlike buildings from a single cultural background, Kaiping Diaolou reflect the exchange and fusion between Chinese and Western cultures. This feature of cultural blending makes Diaolou not only a Chinese cultural heritage but also a testament to global cultural interactions.

Moreover, the comparison of Kaiping Diaolou with other cultural heritage sites reveals their unique value in terms of historical memory and cultural inheritance. Compared to other cultural heritage sites, Kaiping Diaolou are not only defensive structures but also symbols of family history, social structure, and cultural identity. Their complex historical background and rich cultural connotations give Kaiping Diaolou an important position in global cultural heritage.

### 4.3.3. The Exemplary Role of Diaolou in Cultural Heritage Protection

As a World Cultural Heritage site, Kaiping Diaolou has played a significant exemplary role in the protection of cultural heritage. The preservation of Diaolou goes beyond maintaining the buildings themselves; it also involves passing down the historical memories and cultural values they embody. The protection efforts for Kaiping Diaolou have gained widespread recognition from the international community, making it a successful case in cultural heritage conservation. The preservation and restoration of Diaolou emphasize maintaining the original appearance and continuing the cultural essence. Through systematic research and restoration of the architectural structure, decorative arts, and historical documents of the Diaolou, their historical authenticity has been preserved. This preservation philosophy is not only applicable to Kaiping Diaolou but also provides valuable insights for the protection of other cultural heritage sites.

Additionally, the exemplary role of Kaiping Diaolou in cultural heritage protection is also reflected in its interaction with the local community. The preservation work of Diaolou involves not only professional restoration teams but also broad participation from local residents. By combining cultural heritage protection with community development, Kaiping Diaolou has achieved an organic integration of cultural heritage with modern life, fostering cultural revitalization and economic development in the area. This win-win model of protection and development offers valuable experience for the preservation efforts of other cultural heritage sites.

In summary, the status of Kaiping Diaolou in global cultural heritage is not only reflected in its uniqueness and cultural value but also demonstrated through its exemplary role in cultural heritage protection, showing how cultural heritage can be effectively preserved and passed down in modern society.

## 5. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1. Summary of the History and Origins of Kaiping Diaolou

Through in-depth research on Kaiping Diaolou, we can clearly summarize the uniqueness of its history and origins. The origins of Kaiping Diaolou are closely related to the return of overseas Chinese who contributed to the construction, reflecting a unique social phenomenon in modern Chinese history. Due to social unrest and threats of foreign invasion, overseas Chinese built these structures, which combined residential and defensive functions, in their hometowns, creating the distinctive Diaolou culture in Kaiping. The construction of Kaiping Diaolou was not only a strategy to address external security threats but also a way for overseas Chinese to display their wealth and social status in their homeland. The distribution of Diaolou is closely linked to the socio-economic development of the Kaiping region, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the social structure at that time.

The architectural form of Diaolou combines Chinese traditional and Western architectural styles, showcasing the exchange and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. The building materials, structural design, and decorative styles of Diaolou retain the characteristics of traditional Chinese architecture while incorporating Western design elements, resulting in a distinctive architectural form. This phenomenon not only bears witness to the social changes in the Kaiping region during a specific historical period but also provides valuable physical evidence for understanding the interaction between Chinese and world cultures.

### 5.2. Summary of the Cultural Value of Kaiping Diaolou

Kaiping Diaolou, as a unique architectural type, holds significant cultural value. Firstly, Diaolou are not merely buildings but also symbols of family history and social status, carrying rich historical memories and cultural heritage. Behind each Diaolou lies a story of a family's rise and fall, preserved

and passed down through oral history, written records, and the symbols and patterns within the architecture itself. Secondly, as a product of Sino-Western cultural fusion, Kaiping Diaolou possesses remarkable cultural blending value. The architectural style and functional design of Diaolou reflect the close ties between the Kaiping region and the outside world in modern society, showcasing China's adaptability and innovative capabilities in the face of globalization. This phenomenon of cultural blending provides a unique perspective for studying modern Chinese history and global cultural interactions. Finally, the cultural value of Kaiping Diaolou is also reflected in its contribution to community cohesion. Diaolou serve not only as tangible cultural heritage but also as important carriers of spiritual culture within the local community. As significant landmarks within the community, Diaolou bear the collective memory and cultural identity of its members, serving as key factors in maintaining community cohesion.

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