Problems of Heterotopias
- Rethinking the State of Urban Housing in Contemporary China*
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<ABSTRACT>
Heterotopias의 문제
현대중국에서의 도시주택 현황에 대한 재고
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Heterotopia, originally a medical term, means displacement of an organ or other body part to an abnormal location. The French philosopher Michel Foucault used it to refer to other places in opposite to utopias. When analyzing the urban social space structure in China, I tend to differentiate some new structural elements stimulated by the great social changes from the urban system that has generated both spontaneously and traditionally and developed on the base of original structure. And these new

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elements can be seen as heterotopias. Having both sociological and cultural senses, heterotopias have played an important role in the process of urban spatial and structural transformation in modern China, and had profound influences on the complications and contradictions of urban housing conditions in contemporary China.

키워드: 헤테로피아, 도시공간, 도시주거
Keywords: heterotopias, urban spatial, urban housing

I. Introduction

Since 1990’s when urban housing production in China entered the market process, the state of urban housing has been greatly changed. There have been obvious improvements in housing planning and design, building quality, and exterior environment in housing estates. But the improvements are mainly at the level of individual physical life while, from the angle of urban sociology, the structural relationships among individuals, and between individual and community have been more complicated. There exist deep historical causes for this kind of state, and heterotopia is a key word to understand it. Heterotopia, originally a medical term, means displacement of an organ or other body part to an abnormal location, or transplantation of tissues. The French philosopher Michel Foucault used it to refer to other places in opposite to utopias.(1) When analyzing the urban social space-structure in China, I tend to differentiate some new structural elements stimulated by the great social changes from the urban system that has generated both spontaneously and traditionally and developed on the base of original structure. And these new elements can be seen as heterotopias. Having both sociological and cultural senses, heterotopias have played an important role in the process of urban spatial and structural transformation in modern China, and had profound influences on the complications and contradictions of urban housing conditions in contemporary China.

II. The Problems of Heterotopias in the Sense of Sociology

Since 1950’s, units, i.e., various institutions and state-run enterprises, have become the guiding forces in urban developments in China because of their political priorities. As newcomers, the units, the heterotopias, have brought new structural systems parallel to the existing urban structure. According to the welfare housing policy, the units would provide houses for the employees and their families who came from other places of the country with different backgrounds of education, and the local employees, if any, stayed in their old houses in the old blocks. Until the state government started a reform of the housing policy in early 1990’s, the employees from other places and their families lived in the housing