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Living Room Internationalism Delimited

This paper interrogates Foucault's idea of heterotopia (1967) by investigating the researcher's apartment in the southern Chinese city of Shantou as a locus where privileged travelers (Amit 2007) and locals learn about the "Other." Shantou locals, other Chinese, and foreign nationals attend irregularly held, largely English-speaking, Open Houses where attendees' practices of hierarchy and identities as locals and outsiders affect their participation. Yet participants construct the Open House as a self-conscious zone of international, open, and informal encounter. This open attitude highlights national and regional identities and hierarchical modes of participation as both conversation topics and Open House practices. Hence, in the process of learning about the Other, participants both utilize and deconstruct identities and hierarchies. This contested interaction plus attendees' self-consciously open attitude toward the event and construction of the researcher's living room as a liminal space help characterize the Open House as a heterotopia. Yet the delimited scope of the Open House events raises questions about determining for whom and for how long such heterotopias and their possibly liberatory effects exist.