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CROSSING BORDERS BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE – HOW THE WORLDS OF WOMEN AND MEN ARE CHANGING IN JAPAN AND CHINA

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1. Introduction

Variations of change are often addressed in contemporary scientific debates. One fundamental aspect of change relates to the worlds of women and men. A major concept to conceive the engendered worlds is the distinction of public and private. For over a hundred years, the dichotomy public vs. private has pervaded Western thought.² With this binary opposition, the social realms of women and men have been neatly categorized as separate. Such social structures in which the worlds of the two sexes are segregated can be found in nearly all communities, regardless of their culture. In the following paper, however, we would like to investigate to what extent the concept of public vs. private is present in Japanese and Chinese societies and in what way this social mechanism is responsible for the exclusion of women from such public realms of society as labor and politics.

In this context, we aim at tracing the “border crossings” that members of both sexes undertake and the ensuing perforation of familial and political boundaries in both countries. Yet, before we pursue our investigation, we must establish what we mean when we use the terms “public” and “private”. The boundary between these two spheres is drawn differently by different people in society. Nevertheless, if we consider Europe as a social body, for example, we find that the meaning of these terms is not only subject to continuous change but that this change is linked to the general notions of family and society which are also constantly in flux. Therefore, the terms “public” and “private” are part of a dynamic, not a static dichotomy.

1 This article is based on a paper presented in July 1996 at the 1st Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Workshop at the University of Trier. All three authors cooperated in constituting and editing this paper. Hilaria Gössmann and Kerstin Katharina Vogel co-authored the sections about Japan while Sabine Jakobi is responsible for the chapters on China.

2 See HAUSEN 1992, p. 81.

In this paper, and with respect to Japan and China, we define the “private” as a basic social unit of society in which such fundamental functions as reproduction and caring take place. This includes the family and household in general.³ With the term “public”, we refer to the interaction of basic social units in order to fulfill tasks which concern the general public.

Men are assigned to the public, women to the private sphere. These designations are then confirmed by further binary oppositions which serve to underline the boundary already drawn. However, it is important to emphasize that these attributes are *theoretical constructs* which assign certain roles to each gender. The resulting gender-specific roles – as self-evident as they seem – are not, however, paralleled by equally definite boundaries between the familial and political realms of society. Therefore, if we view the boundary within the public/private dichotomy as impenetrable and the ensuing gender-specific roles as static, we fail to recognize perforations in the borderline between the spheres as well as the mutual aspects of both spheres, that is, where they overlap. Consequently, instances where the borders are crossed by members of either sex would remain unseen.

The following key terms have traditionally been assigned to men and women. Each dichotomy is hierarchically organized.

Fig. 1: The Concepts “Private” and “Public” and their Key Terms

<i>private</i>	<i>public</i>
<i>woman</i>	<i>man</i>
<i>passivity</i>	<i>activity</i>
<i>subjectivity</i>	<i>objectivity</i>
<i>nature</i>	<i>culture</i>
<i>harmony</i>	<i>aggression</i>
<i>emotionality</i>	<i>rationality</i>
<i>powerless</i>	<i>powerful</i>
<i>reproduction</i>	<i>production</i>
<i>family</i>	<i>politics</i>

Again, it is important to emphasize that these dichotomies are not comprised of pairs which are considered to be equal, but contain a hierarchy

3 The meaning of family and household varies in different cultures.

which ranks male attributes above those assigned to the “female”. This phenomenon can be found in Western countries as well as in East Asia.

While in Europe the public/private dichotomy has its ideological foundations in the idea of liberalism⁴, its counterpart in East Asia can be found in Confucianism and its inherent concept of “inside” and “outside”. Here women are assigned to the “inner” world of the family and household while men belong to the “outer” world. The question of the congruency of the public/private and outside/inside dichotomies is one we will address when we consider “border crossings” in both Japan and China. At this point, however, it is important to recognize that liberalism and Confucianism have produced similar and sometimes even the same results concerning gender relationships. The most important result is the exclusion of women from public life⁵. We are aware of the fact that Confucianism is a term that cannot be simplified and that it takes on different shapes in Japan and China. However, although in the present there is a heated debate on the nature and meaning of Confucianism, the context of this paper demands that we refrain from discussing this complex issue in detail. The binary opposition at the basis of Confucianism, however, cannot be overlooked.

How women and men are categorized in accordance with the “inside” and “outside” becomes evident in the following quote by the Chinese Confucian scholar Yang Chen who died 120 A.D.:

If one would administer women with responsibilities which entail contact to the outer world, they would soon stir chaos and confusion in our kingdom. Therefore, one should not grant women participation in government affairs.⁶

Even in contemporary Japan and China, the saying “the man is outside – the woman is inside” (Japanese: *otoko wa soto, onna wa uchi*; Chinese: *nande zai wai, nude zai nei*) is common. Again men and women are ascribed certain areas in society. This dichotomy not only manifests both sexes in their gender roles and tasks but also reinforces gender stereotypes which are difficult to overcome. Therefore, in our view, it is necessary to undermine these categorizations in order to break the vicious cycle of constantly reproducing gender stereotypes, a goal we aim at in this article.

4 See PATEMAN 1989.

5 For more details see the United Nations Human Development Report 1995.

6 Cited in German in LEE-LINKE 1991, p. 82, translated by Kerstin Katharina Vogel.

Feminist theory criticizes the engendering of social tasks and the resulting exclusion of women from the public sphere. Simultaneously it draws attention to the consequences that such dichotomization has for members of both sexes, their relationship to one another and their respective status within the relationship and society. Demands for change vary as feminists do not form a homogenous group. Some have tried to redefine the public/private dichotomy, others intended to abolish this dualism completely and a third group rejects to use it as an analytical framework at all, since its use, even in the form of refutation, can paradoxically propel its influence. Using the slogan “the personal is political” feminist movements of the 1970s in Western countries and in Japan⁷ tried to draw the public’s attention to the “hidden” power structures at the basis of what hegemonic society has defined as a “natural” social structure.⁸ Feminists have emphasized how the power structures in both spheres are intertwined and influence each other mutually. In summary, they have revealed the following:

... personal circumstances are structured by public factors, by laws about rape and abortion, by the status of ‘wife’, by policies on child-care and the allocation of welfare benefits and the sexual division of labor in the home and workplace.⁹

The assignment of women to the private realm does not necessarily deny their participation and influence in certain areas of public life. Instead, this designation aims at prescribing the sort of participation endowed to them and establishes their roles, rights and duties on the juridical and political level. Overcoming these dichotomized spheres, especially when a crossing of the borders between them is offered, although only in a confined way, becomes very difficult. This pertains to Europe as well as Japan and China, although there are differences in degree.¹⁰

In contrast to women, men have usually been political operators whose roles as citizens endowed them with the right to own and inherit pro-

7 In China only very recently independent feminist movements have emerged because of the political structure.

8 For the discussion on public/private see GOULD 1983, LIST 1986, PATEMAN 1989.

9 PATEMAN 1989, p. 131.

10 We do not argue for differences in degree in the sense of modernization theory. This means we do not conceive development as global and linear process towards modernity with nations occupying different stages within. Instead, we use it as a multi-dimensional and multi-cultural concept.

perty as well as with suffrage. If we look at such factors as property and inheritance, the presence of men in both the private and public spheres becomes evident. In the private realm men function as the head of the family and household, in the public realm they function as political agents. Meanwhile, women have been forced into a passive role in which they were and often still are subservient to men.

While the consequences of the public/private dichotomy have become quite subtle, they remain present in today's modern and modernizing societies where they become clearly visible in the woman's double burden of family and work, of reproduction and production. Furthermore, the effects of the dichotomy and its hierarchical nature are evident in the unequal payment and lower status of working women in many parts of public life.¹¹ Nevertheless, the drawing of boundaries between the female and male, private and public spheres and the ensuing crossing of these borders by women and men differ in accordance with the culture, government and historical situation of a particular region. Furthermore, although shifts in the imagined borderline have taken place, in most cases it is the women who have crossed the line to enter the male world, and not vice-versa. In fact, the dichotomy and the resulting binary social structure still exist today and continue to function as mechanisms of exclusion; simultaneously the discursive origins of the dichotomy are suppressed.

In the following sections of this paper, we will take a closer look at shifts in the dichotomies private/public, inside/outside, powerless/powerful and family/politics in Japan and China. We have selected these dichotomies from fig. 1 because they can be regarded as the most important aspects.

2. The Development of Engendered Worlds in Japan

In the Tokugawa period (1600 – 1867), the relationships of men and women were based on the Confucian teaching of the "predominance of men over women" (*danson johi*). Women were assigned to the domestic sphere which was regarded as inferior to the "outside" or public world of men. Confucian writings such as the famous *Onna daigaku takarabako* ("Greater

11 See PATEMAN 1989, p. 123.

Learning for Women")¹² stressed a strong separation of the sexes and prescribed obedience to male authorities (father, husband and, in the case of the latter's death, the eldest son) as the proper behavior for women. Submission to the same male triad was required of women in China.

During the process of modernization in the Meiji period (1868-1912) it became a matter of national concern to adapt the roles of men and women to the structure of a modern state. In 1899, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), a propagator of Western thought, wrote the *Shin onna daigaku* (New Greater Learning for Women) in which he criticizes the behavioral standards of men and women proposed in the *Onna daigaku takarabako*. He advocated a social model in which the two spheres "inside" and "outside" were to be weighed equally. His sentiment becomes evident in his comment on the relationship of husband and wife:

In the relative importance between the two, there should be no difference, save the difference in their work, one inside and the other outside the house. They should be equal in all ways and one party should never bend or try to bend the other in any matter.¹³

This was doubtless a very idealistic view which was inspired by Christian thought. However, it is obvious that the new conception of woman, the "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*)¹⁴, did in fact procure a reevaluation and an upgrading in the status women. As propagated in a newspaper article in the year 1905, men were called upon to work directly for a modernization of the state, whereas women assumed an indirect role in the background:

The wife must try to fulfill the responsibilities in the home so that her husband can work hard and be successful. The husband's success at work is after all, the family's success and the success of the wife herself.¹⁵

12 For a discussion of educational literature for women (*jokunsho*) see KOYAMA 1991, pp. 14-24.

13 Cited from KIYOOKA 1988, p. 238.

14 The concept of *ryōsai kenbo* can be regarded as a mixture of Confucian and Western elements. For a discussion of this aspect see WÖHR 1996. For a thorough study on *ryōsai kenbo* see KOYAMA 1991.

15 Cited from MUTA 1994, p. 64.

Another aspect of the woman's new role in the twentieth century was her taking on the responsibility for the children. In pre-modern times women were not regarded as suitable to educate children, especially boys. However, with the dawn of modernization, the supervision of the children's education became her obligation. In addition, in order to enable women to fulfill the role as "Good Wife, Wise Mother" much emphasis was put on her own education which in turn induced the founding of many girls schools (*jogakkō*). Although the aim of women's education was to form perfect *ryōsai kenbo*, the taste of knowledge that these women experienced in fact motivated some to enter new jobs; many became teachers or journalists.¹⁶ The concept of the working woman did not fundamentally contradict the "Good Wife, Wise Mother" role model because the professional career of women was regarded as secondary to that of men. Furthermore, the double burden of domestic responsibilities and work outside the home was considered natural for women.

The new ideal of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" caused some change in the concept of the segregated worlds of men and women:

The intention of the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology is apparently twofold: On the one hand the ideology seems to have been meant to preserve and even foster the dichotomy of public versus private, male versus female. On the other hand, the female role model of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" can be seen as the transcendence of that very separation, a transcendence proceeding in two opposed directions, to be precise. By stressing the national importance of the contribution of mother and housewife, the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology postulated the inclusion of the female, private sphere in the male, public sphere. Conversely, it subsumed the public under the private by forcing professional women like teachers and nurses to define themselves exclusively in terms of the educational and caring abilities ascribed to them as women and thereby making wage labor appear to be a voluntary contribution motivated by patriotism.¹⁷

As Ulrike Wöhr points out, an outstanding parallel "between the Japanese and Western models is the (fictitious) undoing of the dichotomies of gender and social spheres by establishing a symbolic interrelation between the private and the public sphere".¹⁸ However, this does not mean that the "sepa-

16 For a depiction of the situation of professional women in prewar Japan see MATHIAS 1995.

17 WÖHR 1996, pp. 135-136.

18 WÖHR 1996, p. 137.

ration of the two spheres and the implied hierarchy, favoring the public and the male, are (...) resolved”¹⁹.

Although Japanese women gained the constitutional guarantee of equality after World War II, no fundamental change in gender roles ensued. Whereas up to that time the overwhelming majority of wives in fact had to work in order to support their households, during the years of Japan’s rapid economic growth until the 1970s, the majority of the housewives concentrated exclusively on the education of her children, the household chores and on supporting her husband. For the first time, domestic life became the common mode for married women in Japan.²⁰ With the husbands absent most of the time, the separation of the worlds of men and women was intensified, and eventually confirmed. Compared to some Western countries such as Germany at that time, the Japanese housewife had in fact more freedom in matters of money, budget, and the education of her children; however, this also created a great burden for the working mother who had to combine household chores with employment.

Without doubt, housewives gained a lot of power within the domestic realm during these years. The titles of many articles and books on Japanese women refer to their special role as housewives, as for example the article “Macht über Küche, Kasse, Kinder” (Power over kitchen, money and the children)²¹ or even *Im Reich der mächtigen Frauen* (In the realm of powerful women).²² However, until recently, the authority of women was restricted solely to the domestic sphere. Concerning the dichotomy of “power/powerless” in general, the situation of men and women continued to tilt in the direction of the male who remained head of the household, regardless of his absence. While women seemed to have gained some authority in the private sector, their status at their work places remained one defined by powerlessness; they were restricted to the assistant level and to such domestic duties as serving tea and caring for the needs of their male colleagues. Such powerless working women were called “flowers at the workplace” (*shokuba no hana*). This situation, described in fig. 2, prevailed at least until the 1970s.

19 WÖHR 1996, p. 137.

20 OCHIAI 1994, p. 22.

21 LINHART 1980.

22 KITAMURA 1985.

Fig. 2: *Gender Segregation in Japanese Society up to the 1970s*

<i>Inside:</i>	<i>Outside:</i>
family	working place
“women’s world”	“men’s world”
“Good Wife, Wise Mother”	career-oriented husband
<i>Spheres of Power and Influence:</i>	
invisible (hidden)	visible power of men
power of women	women relatively powerless
father relatively powerless	“flower in the working place”

Before the war, intramarital support was one-sided: The wife was supposed to help her husband fulfill his duties outside the home by managing the domestic sector. When in the 1960’s the idea of the “new family” emerged, the term “family service” (*famiri sōbisu*) came in to use. With the institution of “family service”, the husband was urged to pay attention to his family at least once a week, on Sundays. He was encouraged to take them out for lunch or to the zoo, for example.

3. “Border crossings” in Japanese Society and Media

Until recently, the media widely propagated the segregation of male and female worlds in Japanese society. A common slogan of the time, first used in a TV commercial, was the saying *Otto wa genki de soto ga ii* (“The husband should be healthy and outside the house”). This arrangement was also reflected in Japanese TV dramas²³ whose impact on the debate of gender roles in Japan was and is decisive because the audiences often regard the characters of this popular genre as role models.²⁴

23 For a history of Japanese TV drama and its various genres see TORIYAMA 1986 and SATA & HIRAHARA 1992.

24 It can be assumed that in any country, “television is for some viewers a type of significant other against which - through a type of parasocial interaction process - viewers develop, maintain, and revise their self-concepts, including perceptions of gender and role identification” (NEWTON & BUCK 1985, p. 294). According to a survey conducted in Japan in 1984, women do not watch these dramas merely for entertainment, but also to learn about life (TŌKYŌ-TO SEIKATSU BUNKA KYOKU 1986, p. 109).

Up to the mid 1970's, dramas focussing on the "inside" or domestic sphere (*homu dorama*), portrayed strong "reliable mothers" (*tanomoshii haha*). In contrast, in "dramatic dramas" (*doramachikku dorama*) which depicted the "outside" and the working place, women were depicted as "women condemned to suffer" (*taeru onna*). The message of the TV dramas of that time was obviously the following: Women are to seek happiness inside and not outside the home.²⁵

Fig. 3: Female Stereotypes in Japanese TV Dramas up to the mid 1970s

<i>hōmu dorama</i> ("family drama")	<i>doramachikku dorama</i> ("dramatic drama"):
focuses on the "inside":	focuses on the "outside":
strong, reliable mothers	suffering women
(<i>tanomoshii haha</i>)	(<i>taeru onna</i>)

In response to the United Nation's Decade for Women (1975-1985) and the strengthened role of the Japanese women's movement, the depiction of gender roles in TV dramas gradually changed.²⁶ The cliché of the happy housewife was dismantled as many dramas began to focus on the problems that confront housewives. While in 1974, 46% of all women claimed to be satisfied with their lives, by 1984 the number had dropped to 13%.²⁷ The tendency to depict problems within the domestic sphere still prevails in the present.

In the 1980's, the percentage of working women in Japan increased to such an extent that the number of working married women even surpassed that of housewives. Furthermore, the situation of women on the job changed. Since 1985 when the *Danjo kōyō kintohō* ("Equal Employment Opportunity Law" [EEOL]) was passed, women are no longer forced to accept the role of "flower at the working place". At least theoretically, they now have the chance to pursue a career within the company.

25 MURAMATSU 1979, p. 144.

26 One famous incident was the protest of feminist groups against a TV commercial in which traditional gender roles were depicted. A young woman and a girl say "We are the ones who cook" and a boy answers, "I am the one who eats".

27 MURAMATSU 1986, p. 163.

Japanese TV dramas of the 1990's reflect the changes described above. During the first programs of the TV serials which were aired during prime time between 1992 and 1996²⁸, the majority of the couples depicted embodied the traditional hierarchy where the woman takes on the role as housewife and the man pursues a career. With respect to the starting point of the serials, therefore, the situations in the dramas fall short of the progression of society. However, in more than half of the dramas in which a housewife is portrayed, the woman eventually leaves her husband because she is dissatisfied with the relationship and refuses to tolerate a husband who concentrates solely on his career. The situation develops quite contrary to those of the TV dramas in the 1970's where women are content when they are at home with their family and suffer when they enter the public sphere (see fig. 3). Obviously, the new heroines are no longer content with the role of "Good Wife, Wise Mother". While in the dramas of the 1980's housewives usually left their husbands temporarily because of a lover, in the 1990's the main reason for splitting up becomes the wife's strong desires to start a life of her own and pursue a career. The *young* women in these dramas are primarily those who succeed in crossing the borders between "inside" and "outside" and manage to begin a career. Older women, in contrast, do not succeed in making the break; the heroine of "Onna no iibun" (Objections of a wife)²⁹, for example, gives up her job at a restaurant in order to return to her husband.

During the 1990's, the following pattern became prevalent: At the beginning of the series the wife has a job, but in half the cases analyzed, she is forced to give up her career in order to either follow her husband who has been transferred or to care for the family in his absence. Thus these dramas seem to relay the message that a professional career for married women is only acceptable as long as it does not interfere with her duties at home.

28 The Japanese TV serials were analyzed by Hilaria Gössmann at the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tōkyō in connection with a research project on changes in the Japanese family. This research on Japanese TV dramas is being continued within a project entitled "The Pluralization of Life Styles in Japanese TV Dramas" at the Japanology, University of Trier. For more details and a list of the dramas analyzed see GöSSMANN 1995.

29 Aired by Nihon terebi between October and December 1994.

However, at the end of 1995 a drama titled “Papa Survival”³⁰ was aired which depicted the reversal of traditional gender roles. At the beginning of the drama the wife, who is a career woman, is asked to transfer to New York for three years. Because her husband’s idea of marriage does not tolerate separation for three years, she asks for a divorce. After his wife has left, the husband realizes how difficult it is not only to care for his daughter alone, but to combine his duties as father with the demands of his job at a company. Gradually, however, he becomes very fond of fulfilling his father-role. When he is ordered to transfer to Northern Japan, he refuses because of his daughter, although his unwillingness leads to an end in his career at the company. When his wife returns from New York to find him in this situation, she offers to be a “good wife” again and urges him to accept the transfer. Nevertheless, he decides to stay with the daughter until his wife returns from New York. This reversal of the traditional gender roles leads to a reconciliation of the couple.

In 1995 and 1996 several dramas depicted single fathers. In “Ashita wa daijōbu” (Tomorrow Everything will be Okay)³¹ the hero, a 24 year-old working man, loses his wife in an accident and has to care for his nine month old baby on his own. Although he is urged by his company to remarry as soon as possible in order to be able to concentrate on his work again, he refuses. When he realizes that he cannot succeed in simultaneously raising his son and following his professional career, he commits himself to founding day-care centers within companies. At the end of the drama the hero’s effort is rewarded and he is able to take his child along with him to his workplace and combine both of his duties. Thus child-care is not only transferred into the male, but also into the public realm.

In former dramas which revolve around fathers caring for their children, the problem of combining family and work is dealt on a quite private level, as in “Papa Survival” where a man sacrifices his career to care for his child. The message of this drama is that personal engagement alone is not enough to enable a crossing of the borders between the private and the public. Instead it is made clear that fundamental changes in working life and society are necessary in order for both men and women to have the chance to combine work and family.

30 Aired by TBS between July and September 1995.

31 Aired by Fuji terebi between January and March 1996.

Fig. 4: Crossing Borders between the “Inside” and “Outside” in TV Dramas of the 1990s

<i>inside</i>	<i>ideal:</i>	<i>outside</i>
family	perforation of inside and outside	working place
housewife	working mothers family-oriented fathers	single career-oriented women career-oriented men

As these examples demonstrate, Japanese TV dramas have not solely depicted “border crossings” between the public and private spheres of society as a woman’s activity alone. We are not merely confronted with women who enter the public area of the working place, but also with a number of men, if not in abundance, who assume responsibilities in the private sphere. This development is shown in fig. 4.

Obviously the TV dramas considered promote the crossing of borders between “inside” and “outside”. In the woman’s case, the situation depicted reflects her situation in practice, as many women do in fact combine child care and work in Japan. Men who are willing to take on this double burden, however, are less common in Japanese society. Still, the message of these dramas and their encouragement of an interaction between both spheres parallel educational aims in Japan. Schoolbooks for social studies in the 1990s, for example, comment on gender roles in the following way:

The participation in the society (*shakai sanka*) as well as the education of children and household chores are no more regarded to be the responsibility of one of the sexes, but as a common task of men and women.³²

4. Politics in Japan: “Inside” or “Outside”?

We have already shown how the shifting of boundaries between such public and private spheres as employment and family are depicted in Japanese television dramas. Similar vacillations are and are not recognizable in the political world which seems to be the least accessible public realm for women.

32 Cited from ORTMANNS 1994, p. 302, translated by Hilaria Gössmann.

How accessible or inaccessible politics are for women depends on where the borderline of political influence is drawn, how politics are defined and where they are located in society. If we consider the institutionalized politics of government, we find that women are rarely represented. In the Japanese Lower House, only 2.7% of the representatives are female. The political world is considered the “classical” public sphere and it is the area where men possess and women lack power. In the domain of the family, the situation is converse. Here, in the domestic and private realm, women have power and autonomy, while men are considered powerless.

The phenomenon of women’s absence from institutionalized politics has prevailed in Japan since Japanese women gained suffrage after World War II. The number of female representatives has basically remained the same; only slight deviations have been noted.³³ What are the reasons for this seclusion of women from positions of authority in political parties and government? It seems as though the gap between “inside” and “outside” is wider than in European and American countries, especially with regard to women’s access to regional and national government positions. Time and money are important factors in explaining the inability of women to penetrate the boundaries to this realm. In general, women lack both since a decision to be politically active entails a successful integration of this role into their incontestable domestic responsibilities. If a woman enters the public world, both realms overlap and become intertwined. In contrast, men merely have to cope with their careers as politicians and are released from family duties. Only the husband of one female politician (who was interviewed during a study on female representatives in Japan³⁴) has been willing to assume family and household responsibilities. Usually, it is the wives of politicians who, while remaining in the background, support their husbands in their public duties according to the ideal of *ryōsai kenbo*.

33 An exception is the first election of 39 female legislators to the Lower House in 1946. For an overview of Japanese women in politics see KUBO & GELB 1994 and VOGEL 1997.

34 This interview was conducted by Kerstin Katharina VOGEL, who as a research scholar at the Institute of Gender Studies, Ochanomizu University, performed the interview-study in Tōkyō in 1993/94 as part of the dissertation project on female politicians in Japan. The following statements refer to this study if not indicated otherwise.

However, attributing complete powerlessness to Japanese women on the whole would not be precise. If we redirect our view of politics and the issue of authority to the borderline between the “inside” and “outside”, we find interesting results. It seems as though Japanese women in particular make up a unique hybrid in their unparalleled political formulation of their functions as housewives and mothers. We refer to the domain that these women occupy as a “semi-public” sphere.³⁵ Unlike many of their Western counterparts, Japanese housewives purposely refused to participate in established political institutions which they felt did not represent their personal interests. Instead, they established political networks closely tied to the family and the domestic domain. This strategy still prevails today.

Fig. 5: Creating a New Space between the “Inside” and “Outside”

<i>inside</i>	<i>semi-public</i>	<i>outside</i>
family:	consumer's move-	politics:
women's world	ment (<i>seikyō</i>)	men's world

One example of a female political network is the “consumer's movement” (*seikatsu kurabu seikyō*) which was established in the 1960s in and around Tōkyō and other metropolitan areas.³⁶ The primary intention of this movement was to set up a distribution system for healthy food. However, a second organization, the political network *seikatsusha*, emerged out of this operation. *Seikatsusha* is a group of women who joined together on the local level to voice their interests as women and mothers and, as a result, criticize male politicians for ignoring female demand. By expressing their concerns publicly, these women crossed the borderline from the private into the political and therefore public realm.

The women of *seikatsusha* are concerned mainly with welfare and environmental issues since these are political interests directly related to the traditional female domain. Social welfare, education and pollution are topics which clearly show that the personal is also political. Logically, the personal becomes political for these women at the moment when insufficient environmental policies endanger their children and families or when the establishment of day-care facilities could enable women to combine do-

35 See also ARIGA 1976, LENZ 1997.

36 See also SATŌ 1995.

mestic duties with employment. In short, the authority of women normally assigned to the “interior” is expanded into the “exterior” while not being segregated from the former. This increase in power again represents a break in the borderline between the two spheres.

Fig. 6: Spheres of Power and Influence

familial power of women (housewives)	political power of men
men not present or without power / powerless	women not present or without power / powerless

In summary, becoming a member of a political party and thereby enlarging ones influence in the public realm has not been an option for Japanese women, even in their own view. Japanese women consciously refused to submit to patriarchal structures. Instead, they realized their own concepts of power and aimed at establishing their own political structures which are not subordinate but juxtaposed to the male hierarchies.

In 1975, a *seikatsusha* woman was elected into the Tōkyō Metropolitan Government for the first time. Since then, the network has spread to other prefectures and has become more and more established as a political authority. By 1993, fourteen *seikatsusha* organizations with more than 220,000 members had come into existence.³⁷ In the meantime, 117 representatives have been elected to office in local and regional governments. In order to signify such radical changes such as the rise in the number of *seikatsusha* supported women who were elected to the Upper House in 1989³⁸, the media has invented such terms as “women’s power” (*josei pōwa*) and “power of the housewives” (*shufu pōwa*). However, while these statistics reveal that Japanese women are not always powerless in the public realm, most of the interviewed female politicians relayed a critical attitude towards the concept of power they had been elected to hold. With this idea of power they associated an authority which is inseparable from politics, which is seen as power *over* somebody and which is linked to the abuse of power. In contrast, they defined the concept of power that they intend to assume as the authority to *change* structures and hierarchies. It

37 See KUBO & GELB 1994, p. 140 and also ŌGAI 1994.

38 See also VOGEL 1995.

becomes evident that these women base their power potential on a definition derived from that of the “interior” domain which they apply to the “outside” and to public issues. Hence, they succeed in redefining politics while simultaneously and consciously connecting both spheres. Whether this extended arm of women’s authority will also be able to reach national politics is a question that can only be answered in the future. At present, the interaction of “public” and “private” consists primarily of “border crossings” in one direction (from the “inside” to the “outside”) by members of the female sex. The interaction of private and public will not be complete until men begin to cross in the opposite direction, from public to private.

5. The Development of Engendered Worlds in China

In the last 150 years, Chinese society experienced major social eruptions which heavily influenced the conception of the private and the public. Let us first take a short glance at some moments in history before turning to the present situation. In late imperial China, like in Japan, the idea of sorting certain aspects of life into two categories was defined by the notion of an “inner” (*nei*) and an “outer” (*wai*) sphere³⁹, thus producing a parallel to the Western liberal conception of public and private. However, at the same time, the words “inside” and “outside” literally hint at a *locality* rather than at the *character* of actions, attitudes and discourses. Therefore, in the Chinese construction of an inner and an outer sphere, women had a much stronger bond to their homes than their Western counterparts did. A powerful symbol in Chinese history for the restriction of females to the domestic realm was the painful practice of footbinding⁴⁰ which made

- 39 In the social construction founded on Confucian teachings women were confined to the “inner” sphere, men to the “outer”. Like in Japan, a woman was expected to be a “virtuous wife and good mother” (*xian qi liang mu*) (LEUTNER & SPAKOWSKI 1997, p. 132). For a detailed description of the development of this segregation see EBREY, 1993, pp. 21-44.
- 40 By continually breaking and binding the foot of a girl from an early age on, the Chinese ideal of small feet was pursued. However, the crippled feet were often infected and most women suffered from poor health for the rest of their lives. For an authoritative account on this subject see LEVY 1966. For a new approach see an article by Dorothy Ko 1997 on footbinding.

women physically unable to leave their house or move around without help.

In contrast, the outer sphere was the male domain, although it too was not a homogeneous region based on equality. The area of politics and administration was restricted to the male elite which consisted of men with a moral and literary education (*junzi*). Like in Western countries, the peak of the social hierarchy maintained the political power for itself and in turn became the core of the notion of public. For the average man, however, the outer sphere was the domain of work where he was a subject to political authorities. From mid 19th century onwards, China, which was on her way to modernity, experienced three major periods of radical change (see fig. 7 below).

During the last decades of the declining imperial era at the end of the 19th century, the first small steps towards an opening up of certain public domains for Chinese women were taken. Small groups of pioneering women and men called for an end to the restricted “inner” life of women and demanded a right to basic education for girls.⁴¹ Beginning in 1911 and during the following years of the Republic of China, there was an increase in the number of women working outside the home and, at the same time, the practice of footbinding was legally abolished. The distinction between the “inner” and “outer” spheres became blurred.⁴² The third period, starting with the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, witnessed probably the biggest change in the engendered organization of society in Chinese history. This period will be the focus of the following part of this article.

Fig. 7: Overview of the Change in the Conception of “Inner” and “Outer” during Three Historical Phases

<i>Decay of Imperial China</i>	<i>First “border crossings”: (mid 19th Century)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establishment of girls’ schools - study groups against footbinding

41 See CROLL 1978, pp. 51-56. In addition, for a detailed work on that period see ŌNO 1989.

42 CROLL 1978, p. 130, argues that the major changes at that time occurred in the urban centers and the district towns, thus leaving the vast countryside more or less unaffected.

Republic of China

Increased mobility of women: (1912-1949)

- women stand on their own (big) feet
- increase in female labor force

People's Republic of China

"Women can carry half of the sky" (1949 -)

"Funü ban bian tian"

But: class question outranks woman's question

In short, we can conclude that in the last 150 years Chinese society has been shaken in its ideological foundations. Traditional values and roles have been challenged by both women and men⁴³, although only in regard to the status and life styles of women. The fact that men have not intended to change their way of living only emphasizes once more the inferior position bestowed upon women and their environment. When women began crossing the boundaries of the domestic realm and entered the outside world, the focus shifted from an inner/outer to a private/public dichotomy. Nevertheless, the existing gender dichotomy continued to prevail. Only in periods of crisis resulting in extremely devastating economic conditions did the borderline between the worlds of women and men dissolve for a short time. On the whole, however, the segregation of a female "inner" and a male "outer" sphere was crucial for structuring the living circumstances of men and women.

6. How the Chinese State Molded the "Public" and the "Private"

In the following section of this paper, we will consider how modern communist China molded social and cohabitation structures of Chinese women and men. The party-state, ruled by the Communist Party of China (CPC), had both the authority to designate social reality and to change these definitions according the prevalent political line.

Although rarely, women did occupy leadership positions in the emerging regime, and, with regard to the private/public dichotomy, the new masters of the regime immediately began to redefine the two spheres. They pursued a platform to empower those voices with authority which so far had been mute in the public and especially political domains. Ideally, this meant lending an ear to women and to those men who had been overheard

43 Criticism and the degree of it varied of course among social classes and geographical regions.

until then, notably peasants and workers. Within a process of forceful social reengineering, the party-state transformed the notions of family and politics which until then occupied the classical positions of private and public; within this process, the private was made public through the following reforms:

Women were immediately recruited into the labor force since their contribution was considered crucial for the rebuilding of a China that had suffered severely in civil war years. Participating in production was defined as a social task and women who refused to shed their traditional gender role were stigmatized as “antisocial” outcasts.⁴⁴

Furthermore, every individual was registered in a unit (*danwei*) which designated her/his work place and living space. In this microcosm which formed an intersection between the private and the public, her/his needs were cared for.⁴⁵ Units usually offered basic health care and support for children and the elderly, thus partly relieving women of these chores. Therefore, the former responsibilities of women were shifted from the private to the public sphere where they gained public attention. In addition, marriage arrangements and the solving of personal conflicts were no longer considered to have only private character. In both cases the unit (*danwei*) was involved and represented the public interest as defined by the CPC.⁴⁶

One result of this permeation of the private realm by the (public) state was the almost complete integration of Chinese women into the official labor force which, for the first time in Chinese history, helped them to evolve from potential “border crossers” into active members of public society. Nevertheless, this breakthrough into public areas did not result in a gaining of influence, as women continued to occupy only a small propor-

44 Class considerations and the goal of national reconstruction and development were always considered more important than the “woman question”. See for example the personal experiences of the female author Ding Ling who in the 1930s, was severely criticized by the party for her commitment to the priority of feminism (FEUERWERKER 1982, pp. 1-18). See also WOLF 1985 and LINCK 1997, p. 218.

45 In a way, the *danwei* provides a Chinese equivalent to the semi-public sphere in Japan.

46 See for example EVANS 1997, p. 8, who argues that the “publicization” of love and marriage in the official discourse of the party was considered as being done in the interest of the women.

tion of marginal positions in a political realm that maintained its male character. One explanation for the failure of communist policies to integrate women on an equal basis lies in the ambiguous attitude of the regime itself. On the one hand, the CPC propagated “Women’s Liberation” from the beginning of the communist movement in China. However, while this postulation seemed to be genuine during the regime’s first years, the “woman question” later often served as a means of gaining power and control over society.⁴⁷ Behind the promotion of economic independence and power for women also stood the aim of destroying powerful family structures and “old-boys-networks” in order to eliminate potentially resistant forces. Apart from the gender category, political classifications were crucial in the daily life of both sexes in so far as they determined the status of each individual in the new society. Being labeled a “rightist” could at times mean execution or long prison sentences. Interestingly enough, the party-state did not ascribe a particular class label to women, but determined their status via their husbands.

The key terms introduced in fig. 1 of this paper referred to men and women. Most of them can be applied in a further step to Chinese society in general, as shown in fig. 8.

47 Several authors point to the instrumental use of the “woman question” in the late Cultural Revolution. See for example EVANS 1997, p. 8 and JUDD 1994 on the renewal of the debate on women’s political and occupational discrimination in the “campaign to criticize Confucian thought” in the early 1970s. The political participation of women on the elite level reached a climax during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) when, for example, 10% of the Central Committee members were female. Hence, the two women who attained positions in the Politburo at that time (JIANG QING and YE QUN) owed this achievement to the prominent positions of their husbands (ROSEN 1995, pp. 317-319). Note in this context also that sexual violence against women reached a climax in the same time, a fact that even attracted the attention of the central party leadership (EVANS 1997, p. 222).

Fig. 8: China: Dichotomy of the Elite and the Masses

elite	masses
rational	emotional
educated (= culture)	uneducated (= nature)
resolute	vulnerable
dominant	subordinate
patriarchal / governing	in need of governing
“male”	“female”

The dichotomy between the masses and the elite parallels that of women and men. Here, the patriarchal elite corresponds to the “male”, being rational, educated, domineering, and resolute. The masses are represented as emotional, uneducated, subordinated, in need of governing and vulnerable; in short, they are conceived as “female”. As explained above, the resignification of the “private” and the “public” soon lost its momentum in propelling female public activity and peasant and working class emancipation and began to function rather as a guarantor of the new political elite’s hegemonic position.⁴⁸

At the end of the seventies, the Chinese party-state introduced economic reforms and initiated a market economy. At the same time, the party withdrew some of its influence from the private sphere, again initiating a change in the male-female dichotomy. The “private” regained some autonomy from public intrusion, political class labels were abolished and gender categories gained even more significance.

At the same time, the withdrawal of government influence from the private sector and its granting more autonomy to its citizens resulted in a

48 The incongruity of the two spheres in favor of the “public” is reflected in a general devaluation of individual, i.e. “private” (*siren*) behaviour as antisocial, selfish and standing in opposition to the public interest. Some scholars have pointed out that the Communist party-state adopted the old Confucian teaching in which individual well-being was deemed secondary to collective prosperity. The following quote reflects this ideal: “In cases of conflict between individual and collective interests, a revolutionary must subordinate the former to the latter” (HENAN SHENG QUANGUO MINZHU FUNÜ LIANHEHUI 1955, p. 7, cited in EVANS 1997, p. 26). Furthermore, the ideological foundation of this policy is the (traditional Confucian) assumption that the stability of the family is fundamental for maintaining social order (EVANS 1997, p. 22).

neglect of the female situation. The privatization of industry and the streamlining of personnel and finances in state-run companies resulted in a worsening of working conditions for women. Women were often the last hired and the first fired and were the first to feel the effects of such drawbacks as the closing of day-care centers in enterprises. The phenomenon of the "housewife" reappeared as more and more women were excluded from the public working realm.⁴⁹ Again, the notions of "public" and "private" were redefined. High-cost social services such as caring for children and the elderly were once again relegated to the private domain and into the hands of women. Simultaneously, family planning, which was formerly designated to the private sector was turned over to public decision makers.⁵⁰

Since the transformation process of the new market economy is still under way in China, conclusions about the positions and roles of women in the family and society cannot yet be fully drawn without neglecting the diversity of the female situation in the context of change.⁵¹ Nevertheless,

- 49 See LEUTNER & SPAKOWSKI 1997, p. 131 and STAIGER 1995, pp. 711-712. In 1990 more than 64% of the urban and 76% of the rural women were part of the workforce (UNICEF 1997). For discrimination against women on the job see "Sex prejudice alive and well". In: HONGKONG STANDARD Jan. 17, 1996. See also XIAO 1993, p. 40.
- 50 Since the mid 1980s family matters such as love and marriage were relieved of direct state intervention and reattained their private nature. This also found its expression in the passing of various revisions of laws concerning marriage and family life in this decade. Nevertheless, the party-state did not withdraw its influence from private matters completely. Some examples: Women in Wuhan, the provincial capital of Hubei Province, are forced to write self-criticism and pay fines for having lost their virginity before marriage. Medical examinations are still required in all areas of China as a prerequisite for a marriage license (CHENG 1996) and, lastly, the government maintains a strong hold on the area of family planning with its "one-child-policy" (EVANS 1997, pp. 9, 23). Although the "one-child-policy" is aimed at both sexes, women bear the major burden of its consequences. One positive effect of state intervention, however, is the new definition of family violence as a public matter. Changsha, the provincial capitol of Hunan Province, has already passed the first official rule against family violence in January 1996 (CND 1996).
- 51 For an overview of the situation of Chinese women in socialist China and an evaluation of the impact of both party-state affirmative action and post-Mao economic reforms see LI 1993. See also the desk study by the German FRIEDRICH-NAUMANN-STIFTUNG 1994 which provides a detailed overview of literature and studies on the situation of women in China during the last fifteen years.

in the last chapter of this paper, we will attempt a deconstruction of the binary oppositions family vs. politics and powerful vs. powerless on the basis of the rural-urban gap.

7. The Rural-Urban Gap: Another Engendered Dichotomy in China?

In rural areas⁵² (especially in low-income regions) traditional family patterns still pervade social life. The head of the household is usually male and represents the family in interactions with the public. Women participate in the labor force by either performing agricultural work or working in rural industries. Their economic contribution, however, does not automatically result in an assimilation of their public status⁵³; women still rarely occupy leading positions in local government and party organizations. Moreover, if they are involved in public affairs, they are usually confined to the "female" domains of education, family planning and health care.⁵⁴ These restrictions, however, do not condemn women to powerlessness in the "semi-public" and private sectors. They exert much power in the private sphere where they have retained the authority to influence their husbands, and their generation of a *high* income, especially on the basis of a learned trade or special capabilities, helps to improve their status within the family and (public) community. On the whole, however, the segregation of the sexes in rural China continues and even exceeds particular roles in the labor force. Women are still identified with the private sphere and

52 The following chapter concerning women in rural regions draws partly on field work conducted in Central China for a dissertation project by Sabine JAKOBI in 1995/96.

53 One indicator for the revival and/or persistance of traditional bias against autonomous women is the increase in reported crimes committed against girls and women. For an account of gender-based violence, especially in rural areas, see GILMARTIN 1990.

54 ROSEN points out that during the reform period there was a decline in women's participation in politics on the elite level and, in rural areas, in party membership. Female cadres who were generally dealing with traditional female responsibilities as education, health and family planning, were not considered to be competent managers and administrators. Consequently, in elections they were often not elected to office when there was a male candidate available (ROSEN 1995, pp. 326-328).

with such domestic duties as reproduction and child rearing.⁵⁵ In this context power of women basically means influence over the male family head and control of the family resources. The link between men and politics in the public realm remains unbroken.⁵⁶ We can therefore conclude that, although women in rural regions have been able to flex the boundaries separating the worlds of the male and female, public and private, outside and inside, these borders remain a stable obstacle posed by hegemonic society.

In urban China, however, the situation is different. Especially in the more educated part of the population (intellectuals, scientists, and cadres), the worlds of men and women are intertwined in various aspects and the assignment of women to a private and of men to a public sphere are challenged, at least in daily life. Traditionally female tasks such as washing and cooking are often shared by both sexes. Women regard their professional career as a basic right and most of them reject the notion of "housewifization" that the media more and more propagates.⁵⁷ Both men and women in the urban social structure regard themselves as equal partners in private and public areas. Nevertheless, certain universal features which we already mentioned with regard to Japan also exist in Chinese cities:

- Women still bear a double burden and assume more domestic tasks than men, even in cases where both sexes are active in both spheres.⁵⁸

55 Some scholars even argue that with the end of collective "public" farming and the return to family farming systems women were forced to return to the classical female locus, the private home (ROSEN 1995, pp. 331). However, different regions in China produce diverse results. For a detailed view see JUDD 1994 and JACKA 1992. JACKA applies the private/public concept to the situation of women in the countryside, and argues that the private sphere was expanded with the feminization of agriculture.

56 For a more differentiated account of the extend and modes of rural women's influence in public affairs see JAKOBI 1997. The underrepresentation of women in local leadership is related to the relatively high rate of illiteracy among rural women. Approximately 70% of China's total 182 million illiterate adults are women, despite the fact that China runs the largest primary school system in the world (UNICEF 1997).

57 See EVANS 1997, p. 28. For a detailed analysis of the current situation see LINCK 1997, p. 220.

58 LINCK 1997, p. 225. The following quotation from CNS reflects this trend (0823-07/ 23.08.1995): "They [mayoresses] are a unique group of people who have two

- Although women are often highly qualified in their professions, they still occupy fewer leading positions than men.⁵⁹
- Women occupy far fewer positions of political responsibility. Here the gender gap is the widest. When women are involved in politics, they often are restricted to figural positions and vice-functions where they do not have much authority. The National People's Congress (NPC), for example, boasts a large number of female members; this parliament itself, however, remains relatively powerless.⁶⁰ In contrast, the most powerful political institution in China, the Politburo of the CPC, has no female members.⁶¹ Women, therefore, are clearly excluded from those areas of politics where changes are instigated and/or prevented.⁶²

Chinese women's organizations began debating about a female conception of power when the anti-corruption campaigns were launched by the party-state at the beginning of the 1990s. The major question discussed by these women was whether the minor involvement of women in corruption cases

seperate roles. Whereas a man returns home at the end of the day and puts his feet up, the working woman slips out of her office suit [...]; she ceases to be the boss with heavy responsibilities and becomes the loving wife and mother who attends to her broad and household chores." Another issue of CNS (0728-02/ 28.07.1995) also hints at the completely different roles of female officials at home and at the office.

- 59 In 1993, for example, women comprised 35% of the personnel in scientific professions. But at the same time women constituted only 5.4% of all elected members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CENTRAL BROADCASTING Beijing 07.08.1995, cit. by Deutsche Welle).
- 60 In 1993, when the 8th NPC was convened, the number of women deputies accounted for 21.03% of the total (THE SITUATION OF CHINESE WOMEN 1994, p. 6). See ROSEN 1995, pp. 317-326 who also emphasizes that women in these bodies are often assigned to posts in areas of public health and education which bring only a limited amount of prestige with them and which are viewed merely as an extension of their former domestic work. DAI 1993 points to the same problems in her review of the political participation of women in Shanghai.
- 61 Since the founding of the CPC in 1921 there have only been three women elected to the Politburo as full members, two of them during the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, there has never been a female member in the Standing Committee of the Politburo (ROSEN 1995, p. 317).
- 62 LEUTNER & SPAKOWSKI 1997, p. 149 point out that political participation at the elite level is not the primary goal of the current women's movement in China. Instead, it concentrates now on a more pragmatic approach of empowerment. For a discussion of that subject by Chinese scholars see HOU 1993, LI 1993 and ZHANG 1993.

reflected their lack of power or if this phenomenon was due to the fact that women use power differently than men.⁶³ In short, the important question of a particularly female concept of power arose, as many feminists postulated this argument as an explanation for women's absence from political scandals. Although on a more local level, Chinese women are politically active and have set goals. They are engaged in solving ecological problems, join organizations which offer consulting for consumers, or found telephone hot-lines for women.⁶⁴ In other words, Chinese women, like their Japanese counterparts, are beginning to assume responsibility for their living situations.

Having introduced the two ends of an imaginary scale of engendered modes of living, we want to point out that the majority of Chinese women and men find an individual way of arranging their world somewhere in between these two extremes. China is still undergoing a massive transformation, economically, politically, and socially. There are an estimated 130 million peasants flowing into the cities in search of better living conditions.⁶⁵ Modern media, especially television, are spreading various notions of the male and female ideal all over the country. We can assume that the traditional social structure of rural China with its clearly defined roles and spheres for men and women will dissolve in the long run and will be replaced by the urban model of highly interwoven and differentiated private and public spheres which are accessible to both sexes.

Conclusion

"Border crossings" between the private and public social realms have increased in Japan and China. However, in most cases, these crossings are

63 For example HOU 1993, pp. 81-82 or CNS (0823-07/ 23.8.1995). See also WEN 1993.

64 The opening of a women's psychological consulting clinic in Guangdong is a good example (CNS 0802-06/ 02.08.1995). LI 1993, pp. 7-9 also underlines the increasing popularity of women's issues in the media during the 1980s and the mushrooming of women's institutes and research centers.

65 According to estimates, about 42% of this so called 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*) is female (HONGKONG STANDARD 03.03.1997). Note in this context that there are different estimates about size and composition of this 'floating population' in China (CHENG 1996).

being performed by one gender and in one direction as women venture into the less familiar territories of the public social sphere. Furthermore, most of the women who leave the "inner" sphere basically do so in order to join the labor market, an area which encompasses only one aspect of public life. In contrast, the political world which unquestionably remains the nucleus of the "public", continues to be the power domain of men, and since men are only occasionally willing to cross the borders into the domestic or "inner" world, the dichotomies of female/male, private/public, inside/outside still prevail. To depict all shifts between the private and public and to give a complete picture of reality, further research in all realms of society is necessary.

Looking at the similarities and differences of the inside/outside and private/public dichotomies, it becomes evident that the first is linked more to location, while the latter refers to the functions, attitudes, and interactions of individuals. Furthermore, in Japan and China we have identified a sphere in-between: the "semi-public" sphere. The intersection of the public and the private in the "semi-public" sphere seems to be a phenomenon of modern, industrial societies. In summary, the concepts of "private" and "public", "inside" and "outside" still structure the worlds of women and men in Japan and China although the borderlines between these worlds are in flux. This fluctuation creates a malleable living space in which various models for living can be formulated.

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