

# Not-together but not-separate: “Blurred boundaries” in changing Japanese families

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**February 15, 2010**  
**From 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm**  
**Room 301, 3F, Building 10**



**Abstract:**

Social scientists regularly point out the existence of “blurred boundaries” in many Japanese families—in which elder and younger adult generations live separately, but still regard themselves as connected, often as two generations of the same family. This talk explores important questions raised by these separate-but-still-connected family generations: Are they one family unit, or two? (Or neither?) How do they fit into the conventional focus on postwar family change, as a “shift” from a three-generation ie to a two-generation nuclear family?

“Blurred” families require that we look beyond family *forms*, and focus ethnographically on how (and why) family members are structuring their own organizations over time. This talk is based on a longitudinal ethnographic study of households in eastern (Toshin) Nagano Prefecture and Tokyo, followed over a three-generation time span.

The presentation looks at family cases, examining the reasons behind the separate-but-connected arrangements, and the dynamics they produced. These include a series of dilemmas faced by both generations, which created considerable conflicts and tensions. Finally, the talk explores characteristics of the “blurred boundary” phenomena that point to a different trajectory for family change in postwar Japan. These include a family that exists as more than one point in space, (and is not a bounded unit); a family that resembles neither the “traditional ie”, nor the “nuclear family”; and a family that includes relationships between a changing ie that is closely linked to a nuclear-family-with-strings.

Dr. Bachnik is a Professor of Anthropology (retired), Ministry of Education, National Institute of Multimedia Education, Japan. Prior to this she spent twelve years in the Dept. of Anthropology, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C., U.S. She is currently a Research Associate at the Institute of Comparative Culture, Sophia University. Her major publications on the Japanese family include: *Family, Self, and Society in Contemporary Japan*, University of California Press, *forthcoming*; *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language* (co-edited with Charles J. Quinn) Princeton University Press, 1994, and a web tutorial, *At Home in Japan: What No One Tells You* <http://athome.nealrc.org>, accessed by half a million users worldwide since 2004.

No registration required

Lecture in English (No translation)

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