

Huping Ling Bio

[Huping Ling](#) (令狐萍) is Professor of History at Truman State University, Changjiang Scholar Chair Professor at China Central Normal University. She is the inaugural book series editor [Asian American Studies Today](#) for Rutgers University Press. An internationally renowned historian and prolific prize-winning author, She has published 11 books including [Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives](#) (SUNY, 1998), [Jinshan Yao: A History of Chinese American Women](#) (1999, winner of Ford Foundation Book Award, in American Studies Series by the Chinese Academy of Social Science), [Pin Piao Mei Guo: New Immigrants in America](#) (2003), [Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community](#) (2004), [Chinese in St. Louis: 1857-2007](#) (2007), [Voices of the Heart: Asian American Women on Immigration, Work, and Family](#) (2007), [Emerging Voices: the Experiences of the Underrepresented Asian Americans](#) (2008), [Asian America: Forming New Communities, Expanding Boundaries](#) (2009), [Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia](#) (co-editor, 2 Vols. M. E. Sharpe, 2010, *Booklist/Reference Books Bulletin* Editors' Choice 2010 Award), and [Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community Since 1870](#) (Stanford U. Press, 2012). She was the Executive Editor for *the Journal of Asian American Studies* (JAAS 2008-2012), and serves as a consultant to the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Guangdong Provincial Government.

Abstract

Taishanese “Widow” and American Concubine—How Transnational Migration Has Impacted the Family Life of Early Chinese Immigrants

Transnationalism has been known as social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Transnational migration has also impacted the family life of the early Chinese immigrants in America. Historical records reveal a few distinctive patterns of marriages among the early Chinese immigrant families, as they negotiated the transnational borders. I have classified them into the following categories: 1) the transnational split marriage—Taishanese “widow” and American concubine; 2) traditional marriage; 3) American urban adaptation: love union, interracial marriage, and widows remarriage.

The marriage patterns among the Chinese transnational communities reveal the practicality and adaptability of the Chinese in coping with the difficult immigrant realities. The transnational split marriage was an arrangement and a practical compromise invented by the immigrants to deal with the marital separation caused by immigration, in which a concubine, who was arranged by parents or the first wife of an immigrant with a specific purpose of taking care of his physical needs while abroad, and the first wife, who remained in home village to fulfill the filial piety on the behalf of her husband, jointly completed the biological, socioeconomic, and emotional duties expected of a traditional wife by the society. Meanwhile the variances of American urban marriages--love union, interracial marriage, and widow remarriage—indicate the inevitable transformation of marriage, which as an institution tends to adjust to the prevailing socioeconomic and cultural environment.

Using archival manuscripts, censuses, news reports, and interviews, this study investigates how transnational migration has shaped the early Chinese communities in America.