Traversing Boundaries: Bridging Asian and Asian American Studies through Critical Mixed Race Studies

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, trade, imperial expansion, global labor migration, and overseas study brought China and the US in closer contact than ever before. Out of the cross-cultural encounters engendered by these intersecting transnational movements emerged mixed families – some forming in the US, some in China, and countless others in the British colony of Hong Kong. Yet their stories remain largely unknown. This talk will address these hidden histories of Sino-Western families through an examination of case studies of transnational and/or mixed families who lived in the US, China, and Hong Kong during the Treaty Port Era. In addition, the talk will consider the implications of comparative or transnational research that crosses the boundaries between Asian and Asian American studies.

Emma J. Teng is the T.T. and Wei Fong Chao Professor of Asian Civilizations at MIT, with a dual appointment on the Global Studies and Languages, and History Faculties. She is the author of Taiwan’s Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895 and Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China and Hong Kong, 1842-1943. Continuing her trajectory of work on migration, diaspora, and transculturation, Teng’s current projects include an exhibit on the early history (1877-1931) of Chinese students at MIT, and a study of pioneering Chinese culinary author, Buwei Yang Chao (1889-1981).