



# Repositioning Taiwan: Historical Representation and Transformative Identity in Taiwanese American Literature

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## Abstract

This article investigates how Taiwanese American writers represent Taiwan history in literary works with a focus on a female perspective as a way of reconstructing identities and repositioning Taiwan on a global scale. With the case studies of the first-generation Taiwanese American writer Joyce Huang's *Yangmei Trilogy* (2001–2005) and the multiethnic second-generation writer Shawna Yang Ryan's *Green Island* (2016), this article employs Shu-mei Shih's "relational comparison" as a theoretical approach to analyze generational differences and transformative identities in these novels and argues that these authors' writings on Taiwan history in the United States embody the transnational connection between the homeland and the host state. More importantly, by adopting similar historical materials and distinct narrative strategies, these novels demonstrate the involved multifaceted political meanings and cultural interventions by situating Taiwan in the related national, transnational and world histories and in doing so connect and compare Taiwan with other parts of the world.

## Keywords

Taiwanese American literature – Joyce Huang – Shawna Yang Ryan – historical representation – identity

## 1 Introduction

*These arguments about migration suggest that literary classification might depend more on a book's future than on a writer's past. What has happened to the writer is less important, in these accounts, than what happens in the writing and in the reading, though the biography of the writer may influence the way that books are written and received.*

—Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The Location of Literature"<sup>1</sup>

Rebecca L. Walkowitz's remark "literary classification might depend more on a book's future than on a writer's past" brings in a new perspective of studying immigrant literature in the context of world literature. It draws our attention to the significance of the circulation and reception of literature mainly discussed in the current discourse of world literature. More importantly, literary works traveling to geographical locations other than their birthplaces engender the rearrangement of classification, the understanding of foreign culture, and the reproduction of transcultural knowledge.

Corresponding to Walkowitz's viewpoint, I have encountered a similar lived experience. At the airport in Austin, Texas in 2018, I ran into a young white guy who was reading Shawna Yang Ryan's (1976–) *Green Island* (2016) on his way to Taiwan, and was reminded of the influential role of literature, which enables a reader to delve into the culture, history or society of foreign countries through reading. Fiction on the historical representation of Taiwan, like *Green Island*, particularly calls readers' attention to Taiwan's political turbulence of the past and the present, and calls attention to the issues of identity, politics, and international position on the global scale. In an interview by Brian Hioe published in *New Bloom*, Ryan proposes two groups as her book's target audience: one is Taiwanese and Taiwanese-American, and the other is those who have no knowledge about Taiwan. As she notes, "I wanted to construct the story in a way where people who didn't know anything about Taiwan could read it and say, 'Whoa, I have no idea. I didn't even know what Taiwan was. And now I know all this about Taiwan and I want to know more.'"<sup>2</sup> For Ryan, a Taiwanese-American writer, her purpose of writing on Taiwan is multifaceted, including self-identification, representing the history of Taiwan, and helping more people to know about Taiwan so as to promote its international recognition. In the

1 Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer," *Contemporary Literature*, 47, 4 (2006), 534. DOI: 10.1353/cli.2007.0019.

2 Brian Hioe. "Interview: Shawna Yang Ryan." *New Bloom*. June 20, 2016, <https://newbloommag.net/2016/06/20/interview-shawna-yang-ryan/>. Accessed March 30, 2019.

same interview, her self-positioning while writing the novel is easily accessible, “I’ve tried to write against this dominant narrative of China. Like: What is the Chinese diaspora? People would probably situate Taiwan in that, but I want to also give it its own place that is not within that bubble.”<sup>3</sup> Rather than identifying as Asian American or Chinese American, Ryan is conscious of constructing her identity with her mother’s homeland: Taiwan. Taiwanese-American identity thus becomes key in the creation of *Green Island*. Her writing of *Green Island* makes it possible for Taiwan to be understood, mapped, and recognized in relation to the world.

Similarly, ten more years before the publication of *Green Island*, the first-generation Taiwanese immigrant writer Joyce Huang (Huang Juan 1945–), published her fiction series *Yangmei Trilogy* (*Yangmei sanbuqu*, 2001–2005)<sup>4</sup> in Taiwan, and these novels also address the history of Taiwan from the Japanese colonial period to the first Democratic Progressive Party (DPP hereafter) president of Taiwan, elected in 2000. However, Huang has physically experienced more historical moments in Taiwan than Ryan, including the 228 Incident, the White Terror,<sup>5</sup> and the pro-independence movements in the United States. Huang’s personal witnessing of and experience of these events have directly influenced her fiction writing on Taiwan’s history, and contributed to her conceptualization of “Taiwanese American literature” (*Taimeiren wenxue*). According to Su-Lan Hsu, “Huang Juan’s *Yangmei Trilogy* is the ‘authentic’ overseas student literature in Taiwan”<sup>6</sup> in comparison to the mainland writers who were born in China and who retreated to Taiwan after the Chinese civil war. Writers such as Yu Li-Hua, Nieh Hua-Ling and Bai Xian-Yong write from the perspective of Chinese in exile and regard Taiwan as another temporary residence, not their native place. For Huang, who sees Taiwan as her homeland

3 Ibid.

4 *Yangmei Trilogy* includes three episodes: Huang Juan 黃娟. *Lishi de Jiaoyin* 歷史的腳印 [The Historical Footprint] (Taipei: Chien-wei, 2001). *Hanchan* 寒蟬 [The Winter Cicada] (Taipei: Chien-wei, 2003). *Ruotu Fanshu* 落土蕃薯 [*The Rooted Sweet Potatoes*] (Taipei: Chien-wei, 2005).

5 The 228 Incident, also called the 228 Massacre, was an anti-government uprising in Taiwan spurred by a conflict between the police and the general public over contraband tobacco on February 27, 1947. The incident was violently suppressed by the KMT and resulted in thousands of people’s deaths. It also marked as the beginning of the era of martial law known as the White Terror.

6 Hsu Su-Lan 許素蘭, “Guanyu Taiwan niuxingde dahe xiaoshuo 關於台灣女性的大河小說 [About Taiwanese Women’s Roman-fleuve],” in *Taiwan Xiandandai zuojia yanjiu ziliao huibian—Huang Juan* 台灣現當代作家研究資料彙編—黃娟 [Collection of Contemporary Taiwan Writer Studies: Huang Juan], ed. Zhang Heng-Hao 張恆豪 (Tainan: National Museum of Taiwan Literature, 2018), 188.

and who situates Taiwan in the center of her fictional narrative, *Yangmei Trilogy* highlights the experiences of overseas students and immigrants who were born and raised in Taiwan. Moreover, Lin Yi-Fu points out that many people become aware of Taiwanese consciousness after moving to the United States, and Huang is one of them. After migrating to the United States in the late 1960s, Huang has undergone at least three stages of identification: Chinese, Asian, and Taiwanese.<sup>7</sup> Seen in this light, Taiwanese immigrants' identities have been transformative in relation to the ethnic relations within the United States and the political situation between Taiwan and the United States. The works by Joyce Huang and Shawna Yang Ryan, as first and second-generation Taiwanese Americans, exemplify how the history of Taiwan has been adopted in the construction of Taiwanese American literature over generations.

## 2 Contextualizing Taiwanese American Literature

In terms of classification, Taiwanese American literature such as Joyce Huang's and Shawna Ryan Yang's works can be classified into a variety of categories, including immigrant literature, Chinese/Asian American literature, Taiwan literature, Sinophone literature to name the significant ones. Language and the authors' ethnicity or nationality are major organizing principles that are used to classify these literary works as well as contextualize and theorize the production and circulation of immigrant literature. In existing scholarship on the literary production by Taiwanese immigrant writers, the discussion is centered around the transformation and reconstruction of identity, with focus on characteristics such as sense of belonging or rootlessness, and the representation of overseas life in order to investigate the relation between migration and literary writing.<sup>8</sup>

For those who moved to the United States since the 1960s for the purpose of study abroad or business, their writings on the host country and the homeland

7 Lin Yi-Fu 林毅夫, "Taiwanren de suxing: Cong Huang Juan zuopin tanshi qi Taiwan yishi de fazhan guocheng 台灣人的甦醒——從黃娟作品探視其台灣意識的發展過程 [The Awakening of Taiwanese: The Development of Taiwan consciousness in Huang Juan's Work]," *Wenxue Taiwan* 文學台灣 [Literary Taiwan], 44 (October 2002): 217.

8 Tsai Ya-Hsun 蔡雅薰, *Cong liuxuesheng dao yimin: Taiwan lumei xuoqia zhi xiaoshuo xilun 從留學生到移民：台灣旅美作家之小說析論 [From Overseas Student to Immigrant: The Study of Taiwanese Immigrant Writers' Writing in the US]* (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2001); Zhu Fang-ling 朱芳玲 *Liudongde xiangchou: Cong liuxuesheng wenxue dao yimin wenxue 流動的鄉愁：從留學生文學到移民文學 [The Floating Nostalgia: From Overseas Student Literature to Immigrant Literature]* (Tainan: National Museum of Taiwan Literature, 2013).

can be categorized as overseas student literature (*liuxuesheng wenxue*) or immigrant literature (*yimin wenxue*) according to the author's identity. The first-generation immigrant writers such as Yu Li-Hua, Nieh Hua-Ling, and Bai Hsien-Yong are mostly mainlanders, and their literary works strongly reflect a sense of rootlessness and being out of place in the host country; meanwhile, their works highly value the close connection with their homeland—in this case China, not Taiwan. These writers frequently praise and utilize their identity as Chinese (*zhongguoren*) that embodies their diasporic consciousness. However, those who were born in Taiwan as local Taiwanese (*benshengren*) imagine the homeland and construct their identity distinctly in comparison with the mainlander (*waishengren*) writers. The birth of “Taiwanese” identity in overseas student literature and immigrant literature can be dated to the pro-independence and nativist movements in Taiwan since the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the construction of Taiwanese-ness, through such markers as Taiwan's history, culture, and Taiwanese subjectivity and identity, has been explored by Taiwanese immigrant writers to differentiate themselves from mainlanders. Taiwanese American literature thus becomes a new category that differs from Chinese American literature with reference to the authors' self-positioning and connection with Taiwan.

With the emerging trend of world literature, we may push another step ahead to utilize the production of immigrant literature as a material entity to reconsider the relation between the homeland and the host state through a relational perspective. According to Shu-mei Shih, the discourses of world literature coined by Western theorists—Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, and David Damrosch—have been Eurocentric and excluded literature produced in the margins of Europe or in smaller countries.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Franco Moretti suggests “distance reading” as an approach in conjunction with world literature, but he only addresses the circulation of novels written in the West and distributed to the East.<sup>11</sup> Pascale Casanova highlights the colonial history and the unequal structure of world literature while reaffirming Paris as the center of world literature.<sup>12</sup> David Damrosch recognizes the translation, publication and distribution of texts that travel to places other than their origin as world

9 Hsin-Chin Hsieh. “History, Politics, and Identity: Joyce Huang and Taiwanese American Literature.” *Chinese American: History and Perspectives* 31 (2017): 29.

10 Shih Shu-mei 史書美, “Guanxi de bijiaoxue 關係的比較學 [Comparion as Relation],” *Sun Yat-sen Journal of Humanities* 中山人文學報 39 (2015): 5.

11 Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (2000), 54–68.

12 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, translated by M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

literature.<sup>13</sup> In comparison to those theorists of world literature, Shu-mei Shih sees all literatures, no matter where they are produced, as participants in the network of power-infected relations, and suggests that scholars of world literature should analyze the texts in the context of world history<sup>14</sup> as it has been newly developed from the 1990s onwards.<sup>15</sup> Shih further proposes a conception of world literature as “relational comparison”:

While Gilssant writes that the word *Relation* “functions somewhat like an intransitive verb” (27)—the condition of existence—I would extend his claim and assert that it can also function like a transitive verb, and thus Relation acts directly upon objects, terms, languages, texts, peoples, and societies and dispenses with any notion of insularity. I have called this active mode of Relation—the bringing of certain entities into relation—the method of relational comparison. The entities brought together for comparison are, so to speak *relationed*...I consider the excavation of these relationalities to be the ethical practice of comparison, where marginalized texts from so-called peripheries or semi-peripheries can, as much as canonical texts, be brought into Relation.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Shih additionally remarks, “What I propose, then, is a conception of world literature that emphasizes its situatedness in world history as a field of power relations while recognizing its literariness as constituting its worldliness.”<sup>17</sup> The keywords—situatedness, literariness and worldliness—point to a new methodology of studying transnational literary production in relation to the development of world history. What is inspiring in Shih’s conceptualization of “relational comparison” is the connection across time, space, and language, and the creative imagination that links incidents and literary production occurring in different geographical locales.

The two writers discussed in this essay—Joyce Huang and Shawana Yang Ryan—share similar backgrounds as Taiwanese Americans, and focus on similar materials in writing; the essential difference between them is language. As

13 David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

14 Shih Shu-mei 史書美, “Guanxi de bijiaoxue 關係的比較學 [Comparison as Relation],” 5.

15 See for example: Arif Dirlik’s *Postmodernity’s Histories: The Past as Legacy and Project* (2001), Prasenjit Duara’s *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then* (2004); Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *The Crises of Civilization: Exploring Global and Planetary Histories* (2018).

16 Shu-mei Shih, “World Studies and Relational Comparison,” *PMLA* 130.2 (2015): 436.

17 *Ibid.*, 437.

a Taiwan-born first-generation American writer, Joyce Huang has written in Chinese throughout her career, whereas Shawna Yang Ryan was born in the United States and her mother tongue is English. Due to the organizing principles in each classification, it is not practical to analyze their works in the same paradigm, though Sinophone studies, for instance, looks at the place-based cultural production in Sinitic languages and, therefore Sinophone American literature could be a possible category; yet Ryan's Anglophone work is hardly categorized as Sinophone production. Therefore, world literature that highlights the circulation of work and the relation between places helps us to consider the connection between Joyce Huang and Shawna Yang Ryan in literature. Their migration experiences as well as the travel of their works (produced in the United States, published, translated and circulated in both Sinophone and Anglophone worlds) become a means of intervention for the recognition of Taiwan in the world.

Positioning Joyce Huang and Shawna Yang Ryan in the context of Taiwanese American literature and adopting the methodology of world literature, this essay explores how and why these two female writers represent Taiwan history from the long-distance perspective of first and second-generation Taiwanese Americans, to explore the significance of writing the history of Taiwan and constructing transformative identities. Joyce Huang's *Yangmei Trilogy* sheds light on the female protagonist Xingzi's lived experiences in response to the ongoing construction of Taiwanese identity since the Japanese colonial period. It is an ideology-oriented narrative that reflects and highlights first-generation Taiwanese immigrants' witnessing of and involvement in multiple historical incidents in Taiwan as well as overseas pro-independence movements as a form of long-distance nationalism.<sup>18</sup> Shawna Yang Ryan's *Green Island* shares a similar historical context but focuses more on the individual participants, survivors, and their families in the historical events such as the 228 Incident, the White Terror, and overseas surveillance by the Kuomintang (KMT hereafter) government. It singles out the role of Taiwanese women in history and explores

18 The concept "long-distance nationalism" was coined by Benedict Anderson in 1992, referring to exiles and migrants who live in various geographical locales and who are closely connected to a certain territory/state via various forms and actions, such as identity construction, cultural production, voting, and transferring money, etc. Collectively, these people are regarded as a part of the nation. See Benedict Anderson, *Long-distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam, 1992). In this paper, I borrow Anderson's concept to analyze Taiwanese immigrants' identities and political consciousness in Huang's and Ryan's novels. However, most of the characters in Huang's novels are more engaged in long-distance nationalism than those in Ryan's *Green Island*, whose practice of long-distance nationalism only appears in a certain situation, particularly in the overseas pro-independence movement.



the subtle emotions and intimate relationships in the survivors' families. More importantly, since Shawna Yang Ryan is a multiethnic Taiwanese American, she is more concerned about the political relation between Taiwan and the United States from the Cold War to the present. Comparing Huang's and Ryan's fictional work, this essay investigates the representation of Taiwan's history and employs the framework of world literature to analyze the production and circulation of Taiwanese American literature.

### 3 Pioneer, Witness, and Taiwaneseess: Joyce Huang and *Yangmei Trilogy*

Joyce Huang is a Taiwan-born Hakka writer who grew up in Taiwan until 1968, and moved to the United States with her husband who was undertaking study abroad. Her fiction and prose shed light on women's everyday lives, ethnic consciousness (especially for Hakka), and nationalism. Many critics identify Huang as the pioneer of Taiwanese American literature and underscore her major contribution to the representation of overseas life as well as of the politics and the democratic movement in Taiwan.<sup>19</sup> *Yangmei Trilogy* is a semi-autobiography in which the protagonist Xingzi can be interpreted as the embodiment of Joyce Huang who was born in the Japanese colonial period, raised under the autocracy of the KMT government, and who immigrated to the United States in the late 1960s. It is not only a *bildungsroman* of Xingzi, but one that is built upon the intertextual narrative between the personal story and the national history of Taiwan. According to Hsu Su-Lan, *Yangmei Trilogy* is a *bildungsroman* written from a unique angle. As she writes, "Women's *bildungsromane* usually focus on romance, marriage, family and female awakening, but *Yangmei Trilogy* emphasizes women's contributions to the nation-building project and historical representation."<sup>20</sup> Hsu's observation indicates the significance of women in history that is key to Huang's fictional representation of Taiwanese history. Focusing on women's everyday lives, the feminine narrative has sometimes been criticized as trivial. However, Xingzi as a key figure

19 Zhang Heng-Hao 張恆豪, "Huigu yu qianzhan: Huang Juan wenxue yanjiu zongshu 回顧與前瞻：黃娟文學研究綜述 [Retrospection and Prospection: A Summary of Huang Juan's Studies]," In *Taiwan Xiandai dai zuojia yanjiu ziliao huibian—Huang Juan* 台灣現當代作家研究資料彙編—黃娟 [Collection of Contemporary Taiwan Writer Studies: Huang Juan], ed. Zhang Heng-Hao 張恆豪 (Tainan: National Museum of Taiwan Literature, 2018), 74.

20 Hsu Su-Lan 許素蘭, "Guanyu Taiwan niuxingde dahe xiaoshuo 關於台灣女性的大河小說 [About Taiwanese Women's Roman-fleuve]," 188–189.



in *Yangmei Trilogy*, symbolizes significant political and ideological meanings. Huang not only reflects women's self-awakening, but more importantly, depicts Xingzi as a witness and participant in the historical incidents in her life.

*Yangmei Trilogy* is built upon a linear historical narrative that interweaves Xingzi's personal story—from her childhood, through adolescence to adulthood (1945–2000)—with the modern history of Taiwan. These three stages happen to correspond with important historical moments in Taiwan, including Japanese colonization, post-war KMT governance, and the overseas pro-independence movement in the United States (see Table 1).

In the novel, the protagonist Xingzi grows up as a witness to and participant in Taiwan's history. Different from other female protagonists in historical writing, who are often portrayed as passive observers, Xingzi has more agency and self-consciousness, actively engaging in self-identification and reflecting on ethnic relations and nationality. In the beginning of the first episode, *The Historical Footprint* (*Lishi de Jiaoyin*), set in the Japanese colonial period, the tension between the colonizing Japanese and the colonized Taiwanese has been revealed from the perspective of Xingzi as a child. One section reads:

“Taiwanese children are so dirty.”  
“They bare their feet and sneeze.”

The speakers are two women who wear kimono and speak with a disdainful tone.<sup>21</sup> Xingzi has had a sharp eye on ethnic relation since she was little and she notices the hierarchy between Japanese and Taiwanese in everyday life. Taiwanese have been regarded as second-class citizens in many ways including those that affect education and profession. For instance, when Xingzi is ready to attend elementary school, her family is interviewed by the Japanese teacher regarding their attitude toward Japanese governance and the *kominka* movement.<sup>22</sup> “Xingzi faintly senses the tension between Taiwanese and Japanese, although she does not acquire the vocabulary such as ‘colonizer’ and ‘colony.’ But as a child, she notices the difference between Taiwanese and Japanese. They speak different languages, wear different clothes, and live in different

21 Huang Juan 黃娟. *Lishi de Jiaoyin* 歷史的腳印 [The Historical Footprint] (Taipei: Chien-wei, 2001), 9–10. Since Huang's novels are all written in Chinese, all the translations of her works in this article are mine.

22 Huang, *Lishi de Jiaoyin*, 156–157. The *Kominka* movement, also called the Japanization movement, was meant to promote the policy of assimilation to make Japan's colonized (Taiwanese) people become subjects of the emperor through the enforcement of spoken Japanese, the replacing of Chinese names with Japanese names, and the encouraging of Taiwanese to join the Imperial Japanese Army.

TABLE 1 The narrative of *Yangmei Trilogy*

Episode	Time	Location	Historical incident
I <i>Lishi de Jiaoyin</i> (2001)	Japanese colonial period	Yangmei/ Taipei	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Japanese colonialization</li> <li>– <i>Kominka</i> movement/education</li> <li>– World War II</li> </ul>
II <i>Hanchan</i> (2003)	KMT governance	Taipei	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– End of Japanese colonialization</li> <li>– Arrival of the KMT government</li> <li>– Chinese Civil War</li> <li>– 228 Incident</li> <li>– Anti-communist education</li> <li>– Martial law</li> </ul>
III <i>Ruotu fanshu</i> (2005)	Overseas life in the United States	The United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 1965 Association for Taiwan Studies established</li> <li>– 1970 World United Formosans for Independence established</li> <li>– 424 Attempted assassination of Chiang Ching-Kuo<sup>a</sup></li> <li>– Little League World Series baseball game</li> <li>– Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute</li> <li>– 1979 US ends official relations with Taiwan</li> <li>– Chen Wencheng murder under White Terror</li> <li>– Kaohsiung Incident</li> <li>– Murder of Lin Yihsiung's mother and twin daughters</li> <li>– Association for Taiwan Literature Studies established</li> <li>– Taoyuan Airport Incident<sup>b</sup></li> <li>– Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) established</li> <li>– The June Fourth/Tiananmen Square Incident</li> <li>– Hakka ethnic movement</li> <li>– Presidential elections in 1996 and 2000 in Taiwan</li> </ul>

a In 1970, Chiang Ching-Kuo was approached by a gun-wielding Peter Wen-Shiung Huang, a member of the World United Formosans for Independence, at the Plaza Hotel in New York City during Chiang's visit to the United States.

b The Taoyuan Airport Incident was a political rally to support a group of pro-independence figures who were prohibited from entering Taiwan at the airport on November 30, 1986, resulting in a conflict between the police and the supporters.

houses.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, she wonders, “What is our homeland? Teachers tell us we are Japanese, but Japanese children abuse us as ‘chinks.’ Father teaches us that our ancestors come from China, and that Taiwan was ceded to Japan in the late Qing dynasty.”<sup>24</sup> Xingzi’s identification has been constructed through self-positioning between two empires—Japan and China—and through negotiating her behaviors in response to multiple influences of cultures and nationalities. It demonstrates the uncertainty of Taiwanese people in Xingzi’s generation under Japanese colonization.

The narrative of the second episode *The Winter Cicada* (*Hanchan*) begins with the end of Japanese colonization and represents another stage of identification, negotiation and adaptation of Taiwanese after the arrival of the KMT government. Upon the take-over of Taiwan by the mainland Nationalist soldiers, Taiwanese society oscillated due to the soldiers’ brutality. As Xingzi observes, “Everyone was well-behaved, and the public security was good during the Japanese colonial period. Now, China comes, everything is off track, everything is a mess, particularly the soldiers’ acts of violence.”<sup>25</sup> In comparison to Japan, the KMT is a disaster for the local Taiwanese, and the conflict between the mainlanders (*waishengren*) and the local Taiwanese (*benshengren*) finally, in 1947, ignites what would become the 228 Incident. With reference to the identity of the Taiwanese, it has not been self-defined but destined to be controlled by others. “Great Taiwan! You sustain great responsibilities for China and Japan!” Xingzi has mixed feelings since she realizes ‘Taiwan’ is not Taiwanese people’s Taiwan, but is doomed to be controlled by others...<sup>26</sup> At this stage, Taiwan looks like a postcolonial state but it is colonized by the KMT, and the subjectivity of Taiwanese can hardly be constructed by the Taiwanese themselves.

The transformation of self-identification in response to history is a key theme throughout the trilogy. The third episode of *Yangmei Trilogy*, called *The Rooted Sweet Potatoes* (*Ruotu fanshu*), depicts Xingzi’s migration to the United States, and the overseas pro-independence movement (*haiwai Taiwan duli yundong*) in support of activists in Taiwan that ensued. In one scene, Xingzi receives a letter from W, which can be interpreted as the prominent writer Wu Zhuoliu; the letter reminds her of the publication of *Taiwan Wenyi* in 1964 and causes in her a crisis of identity as a Taiwanese.

23 Ibid., 158.

24 Ibid., 195.

25 Huang, Juan 黃娟. *Hanchan* 寒蟬 [The Winter Cicada] (Taipei: Chien-wei, 2003), 60.

26 Ibid., 238.

There is a question that confuses Xingzi for a long time.

“Is Taiwan a shameful title? Or does this word have mysterious power so that the government does not allow its citizens to use it?”

Now Xingzi is no longer confused and she has her own answer in mind. Sitting in the home of the host country, holding Mr. W’s letter in hand, seeing the snowy scene unseen in Taiwan, images come to her mind, namely:

those periodicals, books, and associations in the name “Taiwan” appears: *Taiwan Youth*, *Independence*, and *Foundation of Taiwan*, “Taiwanese Association” etc.

Overseas Taiwanese finally can identify themselves with “Taiwan” freely, although they still need to pay attention to spies and government surveillance.<sup>27</sup>

Prior to the lifting of martial law in Taiwan, people had no freedom of speech. In the novel, because of Xingzi’s migration to the United States, it is possible for her and other Taiwanese immigrants to reflect on self-identification. Xingzi’s thoughts and actions are an explicit response to her political ideology and her identification with Taiwan. Moreover, later in the novel, Xingzi gets involved in the Association for Taiwan Literary Studies and strives to promote Taiwanese literature. As Huang writes in the novel, “Studying Taiwanese literature is a taboo in Taiwan. Therefore, overseas writers and scholars should take advantage of the freedom in their host country to put it into action. At that time, it was of great urgency.”<sup>28</sup> Not only does Xingzi show political concern, she participates in the association and writes critical reviews on Taiwanese literature in order to introduce it to Taiwanese American readers. In reality, Joyce Huang did serve as a member and as the president of the Association for Taiwan Literary Studies. Huang has also written an article reflecting on her role in the association.<sup>29</sup> Xingzi, as the embodiment of Joyce Huang, accomplishes her dreams as a writer and a participant through supporting social movements and literary studies, reflecting how immigrant writers play a significant role in translating and promoting Taiwanese literature internationally. Through her

27 Huang Juan 黃娟. *Ruotu Fanshu* 落土蕃薯 [The Rooted Sweet Potatoes] (Taipei: Chienwei, 2005), 55.

28 *Ibid.*, 296–297.

29 Huang Juan 黃娟. “Taiwan wenxue yanjiuhui yu wo 台灣文學研究會與我 [Association for Taiwan Literary Studies and Me],” in *Taiwan Xiandandai zuojia yanjiu ziliao huibian—Huang Juan* 台灣現當代作家研究資料彙編—黃娟 [The Collection of Contemporary Taiwan Writer Studies: Huang Juan], ed. Zhang Heng-Hao 張恆豪 (Tainan: National Museum of Taiwan Literature, 2018), 111–129.

memory and her perspective as an immigrant, Huang's positioning of Taiwan in relation to China, Japan, and the United States is a means of remapping Taiwan in the context of world history.

Moreover, Xingzi's social and cultural participation can be regarded as long-distance nationalism. In the 1980s, Taiwanese immigrants organized protests and formed Taiwan-related associations in the United States to express support for the Kaohsiung Incident and other pro-independence activities in Taiwan. Chih-Ming Wang claims that this phenomenon is a result of long-distance nationalism:

Initiated by Taiwanese students abroad—first in Japan and later in America—the Taiwanese independence movement can be seen not merely as a pivotal political force in the shaping of Taiwan's national identity, but also a long-distance nationalism that, having emerged in the context of U.S. Cold War structure, has in turn taken a crucial role in the formation of Taiwanese-American identity as a politics of dis-identification.<sup>30</sup>

Due to the political situation in Taiwan, those who are concerned about the future of Taiwan participate in pro-independence activities to show their patriotism. As Wang puts it, this is crucial to the formation of Taiwanese American identity. Interestingly, *The Rooted Sweet Potatoes* ends with the embodiment of long-distance nationalism as overseas Taiwanese immigrants enthusiastically encourage their peers to return to Taiwan for the presidential election in 2000. The candidate these immigrants support finally wins the election. It was the first rotation of the ruling party in Taiwan, and the candidate "C" had been elected as the first DPP president. *Yangmei Trilogy* records this modern history of Taiwan in detail, appearing more non-fictional than fictional. Xingzi's personal story plays a supporting role in the historical narrative, and the history and democratization of Taiwan are the main focus. That is to say, *Yangmei Trilogy* is an ideology-oriented literary work based on real historical events.

*Yangmei Trilogy* reflects Xingzi's lifelong experiences and represents Taiwan history in the twentieth century as well as the transformative construction of Taiwanese identities in terms of governance and migration. From the first to the third episode of *Yangmei Trilogy*, we not only perceive the historical representation, but also experience the specific influence of the political turbulence

30 Chih-Ming Wang, *Transpacific Articulations: Student Migration and the Rethinking of Asian America* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 91.

in everyday life. Joyce Huang as a first-generation Taiwanese-American writer makes a great contribution to Taiwanese-American literature by employing Taiwanese-ness and highlighting Taiwanese identity. Moreover, it is the socio-political condition of Taiwan that encouraged Joyce Huang to write *Yangmei Trilogy* and other works on related issues that include postcolonial trauma and identity crisis. Writing enables Huang to clarify her self-positioning and identity at each stage, and reflect the difficulties of politics and the international position of Taiwan. More importantly, Taiwanese-American identity has been constructed by bringing together Huang's personal experience and witnessing of history with literary writing.

For the first-generation immigrant writers who have written in Chinese and published their works in Taiwan, the circulation and reception of their writings have their limitations. For one, the target readership is Taiwanese who might be interested in learning more about immigrants' overseas lives. Further, due to the problem of language, Sinophone American literature can hardly reach a broader scope of readers and exercise its influence all over the world. As David Damrosch proposes, translation is key to the circulation of literature. "...works of world literature take on a new life as they move into the world at large, and to understand this new life we need to look closely at the ways the work becomes reframed in its translation and in its new cultural context."<sup>31</sup> Although Joyce Huang, as an immigrant writer, strives to write about Taiwan and to conceptualize Taiwanese-American literature, the distribution of her works has been limited to Sinophone readers.

#### 4 Trauma, Memory, and Americanness: Shawna Yang Ryan and *Green Island*

If translation is key to the formation of world literature, would immigrant literature written in English be more accessible by the world? Could a smaller country like Taiwan be more visible on the global scale because of being represented in Anglophone literature? An immigrant writer or one who writes about the immigrant experiences as an agent has the ability to employ and translate sociocultural elements of the homeland and the host state. In Joyce Huang's case, her fictional works explicitly unfold her close connection with Taiwan, and her appropriation and construction of Taiwanese-ness. Huang's Taiwanese-American literature is more Taiwan-based than US-based, and her historical representation is built on her lived experience. In terms of generation, most first-generation Taiwanese immigrants have undergone the double shift in

<sup>31</sup> David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 24.

regimes of the first-half of the twentieth century—Japanese colonization and the handover to the Republic of China (ROC)—and they are sensitive to the self-identification and the subjectivity of Taiwan as represented in Joyce Huang's *Yangmei Trilogy*. However, second-generation Taiwanese Americans were born and raised in the United States. The sociopolitical environment of the United States and the international relations between Taiwan, the US, and China have been changing while the second generation grew up. In this regard, the project of writing Taiwan in Anglophone literature is worthy of exploration to scrutinize its motivation, contextualization, and circulation. As mentioned in the introduction, Shawna Yang Ryan, as a rising star in the field of Taiwanese-American literature, is skilled at self-positioning and strategies that exemplify a new paradigm of writing Taiwan from an immigrant's perspective.

Shawna Yang Ryan is a second-generation Taiwanese-American writer whose father is American and whose mother comes from Taiwan. She currently teaches creative writing at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and has published two novels: *Water Ghost* (2009) and *Green Island* (2016). Similar to Joyce Huang's *Yangmei Trilogy*, Ryan employs a female perspective and creates a protagonist who was born right after the 228 Incident of 1947. *Green Island* is built upon the story of a female protagonist in the Tsai family. The father of the unnamed protagonist is a doctor and a survivor of the 228 Incident who is released after 11-year of imprisonment. The narrative is divided into four sections: 1) Taipei (1947–1952), 2) Taichung (1958–1972), 3) Berkeley (1979–1980), 4) Taipei (1982–2003), and follows the female protagonist as she grows up and moves through cities and countries (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 The narrative of *Green Island*

Book	Time	Location	Historical incident
I	1947–1952	Taipei	– 228 Incident – Period of martial law
II	1958–1972	Taichung	– American influence on Taiwan – Taiwan leaves UN
III	1979–1980	Berkeley	– US ends official relations with Taiwan – Chen Wencheng murder under White Terror – Kaohsiung Incident – Murder of Lin Yihsiang's mother and twin daughters
IV	1982–2003	Taipei	– Surveillance by the secret police – SARS



More importantly, the narrative is dated in response to corresponding historical events, including the 228 Incident, the White Terror, the overseas pro-independence movement, and finally SARS. Coincidentally, Joyce Huang and Shawna Yang Ryan both appropriate the strategy that interweaves female personal experience with national history in their narratives and manipulate the real historical events as the major focus to explore how individuals and their families have suffered from, have influenced, and have reacted to political turbulence. However, since Shawna Yang Ryan's background is different from Joyce Huang's, her motivation and strategy of writing *Taiwan* are noteworthy.

First of all, language and target audience are crucial aspects for us to probe Shawna Yang Ryan's motivation of writing on Taiwan, her mother's homeland. A large number of first-generation Taiwanese immigrant writers have written in Chinese since childhood, and their target audience is those who can read Chinese. Language is key to identify formation, such that the first generation retains Chinese as a connection with their heritage that sustains the connection with the homeland. However, the second generation, born and raised in the United States, uses English as their mother tongue, although some of them are also fluent in Mandarin or Hokkien. Writing in English is a choice related to identity, one that reveals that the second-generation's self-identification is explicitly positioned in the United States. In an interview, Ryan addresses the purpose of writing about Taiwan in English as she did in *Green Island*:

In the course of working on this novel, I've come across a lot of misunderstanding about Taiwan among otherwise really well-informed people. The story of Taiwan that was told in the United States for a long time was of our friend Chiang Kai-shek serving as a defense against Communism. That story elided a lot of the troubling parts of Taiwan history. There is also misunderstanding perpetuated by the language that is used to talk about Taiwan—people mistakenly use “reunify” or “split” to talk about Taiwan's relationship with China, because the history is unclear to them.<sup>32</sup>

Writing as a means of clarification and declaration refers to the representative and interpretative position Ryan holds while employing the historical materials of Taiwan in writing. It is also evident that *Green Island*, as a historical fiction about Taiwan, functions as an addendum to the official history. What is

32 Didi Kirsten Tatlow. “Q. and A.: Shawna Yang Ryan on the 1947 Incident That Shaped Taiwan's Identity.” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/23/world/asia/taiwan-shawna-yang-ryan-green-island.html>, March 31, 2019.

more intriguing here is that the representation and interpretation of the 228 Incident are still on the level of myth. Everyone has their own version of the story, from the victim to the governor, from the passersby to the witnesses. Ryan's angle of intervention to the representation of the 228 Incident is significant in three aspects: 1) Ryan writes from an outsider's perspective as a second-generation Taiwanese American; 2) the novel is written in English and was translated into Chinese; 3) Ryan has done interviews and fieldwork to collect data and materials as references. In this respect, *Green Island* offers an alternative angle of the historical and literary representation of the 228 Incident.

What strikes Ryan most is the identity crisis suffered by local Taiwanese after the arrival of the KMT government. Were they Japanese? Chinese? Or Taiwanese? Was the ethnic conflict the only reason for the 228 Incident? These questions give birth to *Green Island*. Writing the history of Ryan's mother's native place can be interpreted as a journey of searching for roots. The act of looking back to the past generates more questions about memory. According to Ryan:

I think something as traumatic as 228 and the White Terror gets integrated into society in such a deep way that its legacy is omnipresent, whether people are aware of it or not, and I definitely wanted to demonstrate that in the story...And it was exactly the idea I started the project with—how that history gets carried on through generations. I talked earlier about how we carry our family histories in our bodies and family rituals.<sup>33</sup>

Trauma lasts longer than we expect, and passes from one generation to the next. Memory is embedded and recorded in line with time. Therefore, the generational difference occurs in memory. Situating the 228 Incident in the novel, Ryan challenges the hegemonic and grand narrative of the 228 Incident, and more importantly, draws her readers' attention to the details, emotions, choices, and destiny of characters in *Green Island*. Thus, it is not only the author's search for roots, but also enables her readers to feel the past, the history, and the trauma in the process of reading.

Along with the first-person female narrator in *Green Island*, the characterization of the female protagonist revolves around the political incidents that happened in Taiwan. The historical narrative is feminine in perspective, and the protagonist's destiny is intertwined with modern history—her birth date is

33 Paul Farrelly. "Shawna Yang Ryan discusses her novel *Green Island*." *The China Story*, June 23, 2016, <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/2017/02/10/interview-with-shawna-yang-ryan-on-green-island/>, accessed June 28, 2020.

March 1, 1947, right after the 228 Incident flared up. As the novel describes the situation,

With the radio station under government guard, everything was a rumor. The rumor of the shootings at the railway station and in front of the American consulate that had taken place on the day of my birth. The rumor that the railroad tracks had been dismantled by citizens to keep Governor-General Chen Yi's troops from moving north. Rumors of indiscriminate shootings, of razor-wire barricades in front of the governor's office, and of Mainlanders tossed off moving trains by angry Taiwanese.<sup>34</sup>

Living through the turbulence of the country causes the protagonist and her family to face fear and violence. The protagonist's mother cannot take a rest after lying-in, and is more concerned about the security of the family. The novel highlights the interrelation between the ethnic conflict and everyday life to uncover the trauma of the victims in the 228 Incident. Meanwhile, the incident results in a broken family and lifelong sadness that affects generation after generation.

Paying attention to the layers of memories and generational differences, the story of *Green Island* crosses three generations of the Tsai family and addresses the protagonist's relationship with the male relatives in her life, including her father Dr. Tsai, a survivor of the 228 Incident, and her husband Lin Wei, an intellectual who is active in the overseas pro-independence movement. Both men play important roles in enlightening the protagonist's political consciousness and self-awaking as a woman. In her childhood, the disappearance of her father was a myth haunting her family, and no one knew the reason for his having gone missing. She writes:

Baba. My mind snagged on the word. Baba. He was a myth, a legend, just a name that could have any person behind it. His name whispered like a demon we were afraid to conjure. But the purse made him real, not a god or ghost. A man who dealt in earthly matters like money. The crumpled bills glared at me from their exile beneath the wardrobe. I was still afraid. A taboo paralyzed my mouth; "Baba" sat on my tongue like a stone and I could give no comfort to my mother.<sup>35</sup>

34 Shawna Yang Ryan. *Green Island* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 16.

35 Ibid., 70.

Here in the passage, the protagonist is a daughter who grows up with her father's absence. The father figure is only embedded in language and objects symbolizing "baba," and is unattainable. The disappearance of the father causes misery and trauma for the entire family until he is released from prison after 11 years. It also leads to the female protagonist's distrust of the idea of "family." She writes: "I pitied myself, a fatherless girl riding along the black fields, past faraway homes lit like dollhouses. I didn't think about where I would sleep, only that I wanted to go away. I vowed to never go back. Family. I decided the word was meaningless, some dream sold to us by story-tellers and government men."<sup>36</sup> The father's arrest after being sentenced as a rebel causes a broken home. *Green Island* carries the clear message that the family's destiny is entwined with the nation, and that both could be destroyed by the dictatorship of the KMT government.

In the third phase of the novel, the female protagonist meets another man who is significant in her life: her husband-to-be Lin Wei, an intellectual who studies abroad and works as a professor in Berkeley, California. Lin Wei symbolizes the generation of overseas students who are passionate about the independence movement of the 1980s. The female protagonist marries Lin through the match-making of the couple's relatives, and they move to the United States right after they marry. Interestingly, the opening of the third phase is dated as 1979, the year after the US government ended its official relation with Taiwan and recognized the legitimacy of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Continuing the political turbulence of Taiwan, overseas intellectuals joined the protests and social movement in the United States. Here we see that long-distance nationalism has again been highlighted in writing about the Taiwanese American community's support for Taiwan. The text reads:

It had taken moving to America for me to realize what Wei had told me during our first meeting was true. American campuses were full of student spies who had been bribed with plane tickets and show tickets and other cheap trinkets by the Nationalists. Speak a wrong word in New Haven and your cousin in Kaohsiung would lose his job. The chain of events could not be coincidence. In America, I had stopped calling myself "Chinese" and started calling myself "Taiwanese." In America, I had met my first Chinese national and discovered the gulf that separated us, despite the language we held in common.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 188–189.

Through marrying Lin Wei and then migrating to the United States, the female protagonist reconstructs her identity and highly values her connection with Taiwan. Furthermore, another significant man in her life is as passionate as her father about politics. “Wei’s political heart lay with underground activists trying to nudge the ruling KMT party, and the de facto one-party system, out of place. He wanted the dictatorship, martial law—all of it—to end. Like my father—I cringed—like my father—he wanted democracy and the island’s self-determination, nay, its independence.”<sup>38</sup> The female protagonist witnesses her beloved ones getting involved in politics, and her family placed under surveillance even after she moves from Taiwan to America. Due to her family’s involvement in the political events, she suffers trauma and depression after the 228 Incident, the White Terror, and the overseas pro-independence movement. That is to say, the protagonist’s destiny, as represented in *Green Island*, is intertwined with men, politics, and history.

With respect to another phase of generational differences, national identity is something that the protagonist attempts to pass down to her daughters who were born in the United States. In Lin’s family’s visit to Taiwan, the female protagonist recalls a memory of fighting with her daughter Emily who was constructing a family tree with her mother’s native place: China.

“I’m not from China,” I had said.

“But the boxes of clothes we get from Ah Ma say ‘Republic of China!’” she insisted.

“Yes, Republic of China. That’s not China.”

“But it says *China*.”

“We are from Taiwan.”

“Then why do they call it China?” Her nostrils flared. She furiously erased the worksheet and the dark litter perfectly expressed her frustration.<sup>39</sup>

Influenced by her father and husband, the protagonist directly expresses her political consciousness while educating her children. For her children who have never been to Taiwan, Taiwan is a place where their parents grew up that only exists on the map. In *Green Island*, Ryan deliberately describes the generational differences by creating three generations of characters and proposes the questions of remembering and identification that are ambiguous and multi-layered for immigrants.

38 Ibid., 191.

39 Ibid., 308.

In addition to the generational difference in the family, the conceptualization and embodiment of “home” haunt the protagonist. In migration studies, home can be spatial or physical, refer to the homeland or host state, and even be created and recreated in different times and spaces. The ending of *Green Island* is set in 2003 when SARS spread in Taiwan. The protagonist and her father are quarantined in the hospital while paying a visit to her sick mother. Ryan utilizes the literary device of the flashback to represent the father’s memory during the Japanese colonial period: “We are curious creatures, we Taiwanese. Orphans. Eventually, orphans must choose their own names and write their own stories. The beauty of orphanhood is the blank slate.”<sup>40</sup> Orphan consciousness, a term coined by Taiwanese writer Wu Zhuoliu, has been appropriated in the novel to symbolize the destiny of Taiwan. It is relatively positive to value the blankness of the orphan who has agency constructing his identity. This might be another reason that motivates Ryan’s publication of *Green Island* to revisit the modern history of Taiwan and make it visible and meaningful. However, the imagination of home is ambivalent throughout the novel. After leaving the hospital and going back to her parents’ home, the protagonist receives an overseas phone call from Lin Wei asking her to come home soon. The protagonist ponders, “His words unstitched me all over again and I cried silently into the phone, finding small comfort as he uttered, ‘Hey, hey, hey. It’s okay. You’ll be home soon.’ *What is home? I wanted to ask. Haven’t I already come home?*”<sup>41</sup> The text reveals that identification for the protagonist is an on-going process that has no end. Similar to Joyce Huang’s *Yangmei Trilogy*, the protagonist’s identity has been transformed and reconstructed in reaction to the political situation and external environment. However, Ryan’s identity as a multiethnic Taiwanese American generates a distinct attitude toward the United States in *Green Island*, that distinguishes it from the stress of Taiwanese-ness in *Yangmei Trilogy*.

In comparison with Joyce Huang, Ryan employs more elements of her birthplace, and emphasizes the significant role of the US in the historical narrative of Taiwan. First of all, speaking of the protagonist’s intimate relationships with her father and husband, gender politics has been manipulated to symbolize the national allegory of Taiwan and the United States in the novel. The disappearance of the father figure crystalizes the incomplete subjectivity and unrecognized international status of Taiwan after the handover to the ROC from the Japanese colonizer. As a local Taiwanese (*benshengren*), living in a family without a father symbolizes the uncertain and incomplete identification, thus the

40 Ibid., 372.

41 Ibid., 375.

protagonist has no name throughout the novel. Her name and her identity await construction. Lin Wei, as a signifier of the United States, marries the protagonist and persuades her to move to the United States. Lin Wei brings hope and enlightenment for the protagonist in terms of political ideology and freedom. Although *Green Island* has been narrated from the female perspective, it is clear that the male figures, including the activist Tang Jia Bao, who stays with the Lin family in the US while in exile take control of the female protagonist in many ways. To push further, the symbolic meanings of the male figures refer to the intricate power relation between two nations—Taiwan and the United States. In regard to the relationship with her father and her husband, the protagonist simultaneously considers the reconstruction of her national identity as a Taiwanese or Taiwanese American, “My family had been lucky. Baba had returned. But could our misfortune be measured on a spectrum? Were we thrown into a collective suffering for being Taiwanese—fate—or something more pedestrian like the ambitions of men working against us?”<sup>42</sup> The presence of her father confirms the protagonist’s identity as a Taiwanese. Moreover, after migrating to the United States, the construction of Taiwanese identity is affirmed: “In America, I had stopped calling myself ‘Chinese’ and started calling myself ‘Taiwanese.’”<sup>43</sup> It is because of her immigration to the US that the protagonist’s identification has been reconstructed, and it draws our attention to the important role of the United States in *Green Island*.

As Shu-mei Shih’s conceptualization of “relational comparison” suggests, “world literature happens in world history, making world-historical perspective necessary for the study of world literature in its synchronic formations and in its longer *durée*.”<sup>44</sup> It is meaningful to situate Taiwan within world history to enhance its visibility and recognition on the international scale, and Ryan adopts such a strategy of writing Taiwan in *Green Island*. The historical narrative dated in 1971 begins with the description of world history at the time:

By 1971, the vocabulary of the world had changed. Some argue that 1968—the year of the student protests in France and the United States, Poland and Yugoslavia; the year Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were shot—was the moment that the dictionaries were burned and rewritten, but this claim disregards the change that happens day by day, so incremental that it is invisible to us, like a snail sliming its way across a road. Somehow, we ended up on the other side of that road, in a world of two

42 Ibid., 218.

43 Ibid., 189.

44 Shih, “World Studies and Relational Comparison,” 130.



Germanys, two Vietnams, and two Chinas, one Free and one Red. The Republic of China and the People's Republic of China.<sup>45</sup>

The historical representation of Taiwan moves beyond national history, highlighting the simultaneous political situations happening in different parts of the world. The employment of world history enables readers to acquire a better sense and knowledge of the international status and political development of Taiwan; meanwhile, it presents the synchronicity of wars, social movements, and protests for sovereignty and human rights, and Taiwan is one of the *loci in quo*. Ryan's incorporation of world history in literary writing can be regarded as a means of worlding Taiwan to foreground the significance of Taiwan and enable the readers to know, imagine and connect Taiwan to the world.

In *Green Island*, the protagonist's attitude toward the United States changes upon her immigration to that country. During the Cold War, many American soldiers vacationed in Taiwan, and Taiwanese society has been influenced by American culture since then. As depicted in the novel, the female protagonist goes to a bar with her girlfriend Ting Ting, whose goal is to marry an American guy. "She kept a diary of her exploits, which she showed me one afternoon. She called it her 'American Tour': a man from each of the fifty states. By the end, she hoped she would have found a husband."<sup>46</sup> The worship of American culture is a paradox in that having an affair with an American was seen as inappropriate since "the only kind of woman who talks to Americans is a whore."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the gender politics between Taiwanese and Americans refer to the power relation between the Third World and the First World. While living in Taiwan, the protagonist perceives the subordinate status of herself as well as Taiwan in their encounter with Americans.

After migrating to the United States, immigrants frequently experience an identity crisis and have difficulty adapting to everyday life. In *Green Island*, attending a faculty gathering at Berkeley, the protagonist again notices her subordination and marginalization by fellow wives, as she imagines, "Cow! Tell me next how my culture has given me the skills to be an amazing house cleaner. An obedient wife. Ask me how many of my friends were prostitutes for GIs. They were kind—too kind—as if I were helpless as bald little newborn mole and they had to show how careful they could be with me, a testament to their generous and socially liberal natures. I had to learn to speak..."<sup>48</sup> The Orientalized imagination of Asian women from the American perspective is typical in

45 Shawna Yang Ryan. *Green Island*, 121.

46 *Ibid.*, 135.

47 *Ibid.*, 139.

48 *Ibid.*, 197.

Asian American literature. Language is a tool for communication as well as a weapon for self-defense, so the protagonist strives for acquiring the language. As described later in the novel, English is selected as the language while the protagonist, Lin Wei and their activist friend Jia Bao are planning a book on Taiwan history, “But the audience is limited if it’s not English.”<sup>49</sup> Self-representation is urgent, in that it enables the subversion of stereotypical impressions and allows self-expression. Through the use of English, literature can travel and the book will reach a wider audience. It is also the reason that motivates Ryan’s production of the novel.

On the other hand, the growing pro-United States consciousness generates the protagonist’s strategic identification of becoming American. During their visit to Taiwan, due to Lin Wei’s involvement in pro-independence activities, the Lin family is under surveillance by the garrison command. The two adults are arrested and confessions are extorted by torture. To beg for release, the protagonist addresses their American citizenship during the interrogation,

“You can’t do this. He’s an American citizen,” I said, even as I knew “citizen” had no traction here in this place where no one who mattered knew where we were...What did those five words—“I am an American citizen”—matter to these men caught up in sadism, enrobed in the moment of inflicting pain on my husband, who had lost his humanity in their eyes? He was just a piece of meat—if that. In fact, his suffering did not exist for them at all. And even if Washington were to find out, official relations between the two countries were nearly dead—would the US government jeopardize what was left for two lowly citizens like us?<sup>50</sup>

In terms of international relations, it is clear that the US holds power over Taiwan, and the protagonist takes advantage of her nationality in exchange for personal freedom. However, according to the depiction, it is understandable that the consciousness of being a second-class citizen still haunts the immigrants in this case. Seen in this light, identity has been transformed and reconstructed in response to the current situation. Furthermore, the finale of *Green Island* describes the quarantine of the protagonist in the hospital due to SARS in 2003. The international TV channel CNN reports the incident just because there is one American citizen involved—the protagonist. The text reads: “CNN debated whether the United States would intervene to release me, or if it would try to negotiate with China to allow the WHO into Taiwan now that American

49 Ibid., 220.

50 Ibid., 334–335.

citizens had been roped into the drama.”<sup>51</sup> On the one hand, Taiwanese Americans were viewed as second-class citizens within US society; on the other hand, Taiwan was being promoted on a global scale because of the incident. To sum up, Shawna Yang Ryan’s pro-American tendency is clear in *Green Island* in her adoption of the perspective and influence of the United States to represent the modern history of Taiwan.

## 5 Conclusion

Taiwanese American literature (*Taimeiren wenxue*) coined by Joyce Huang has its significance in Asian American studies and Taiwanese literature studies. Although Joyce Huang and Shawna Yang Ryan belong to different generations, their writings on Taiwan’s history, and on transnational migration and women’s experience offers an alternative angle for understanding the influence of politics and history on ordinary people.

First of all, with regard to women, although Huang and Ryan both utilize a female perspective to intervene in the male-centered grand narrative, the protagonists play different roles in their writing. In *Yangmei Trilogy*, a semi-autobiography, Xingzi embodies Joyce Huang’s lived experiences as a witness and participant in the historical events and social movements of which she is part or that she witnesses. Moreover, since the trilogy is ideological and non-fictional, the modern history of Taiwan, rather than the story of Xingzi’s life, is the focus. However, *Green Island* sheds light on the female protagonist’s emotions, intimate family relationships, and traumas. The depiction of the historical moments is done for the sake of serving as the background and as informing readers of the cause of trauma in the novel. The Tsai family who suffers the effects of history is key to the narrative that is based on the female protagonist’s personal story.

Secondly, *Yangmei Trilogy* and *Green Island* both highlight the reconstruction of Taiwanese identity and Taiwanese American identity, though the motivation and the transformation of identity are distinct in terms of generational differences. Since Joyce Huang is a first-generation immigrant, she has struggled with a migration-fueled identity crisis. As Xingzi has experienced different regimes in Taiwan and America, her identity has been transformed from Chinese, to Asian and then to Taiwanese through her transnational migration as well as through the influence of the pro-independence movement in the 1980s. *Yangmei Trilogy* only focuses on the first generation of Taiwanese

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 361.

Americans. *Green Island*, on the contrary, is built upon the three generations of the Tsai family, and the subtle generational differences are represented by the difference between the parents' generation and the female protagonist/Lin Wei, and their America-born daughters. It highlights the American influence on the awakening of their ideology, the transformation of self-positioning, as well as the political relations between Taiwan and the United States.

Thirdly, by adopting historical events in the narratives, it is fair to say that both novels carry political meanings. For Joyce Huang, she strives for the construction of ethnic and national identities in her own lived experience. Spending more than a decade at the task, she eventually accomplished her dream of writing a historical fiction of Taiwan. *Yangmei Trilogy* demonstrates her contribution to Taiwanese American literature that aims at distinguishing itself from Chinese American literature. Eleven years after the publication of *Yangmei Trilogy*, Shawna Yang Ryan probes similar historical materials in order to write the history of her mother's homeland from the perspective of a second-generation Taiwanese American. Her knowledge about Taiwan is built upon her interviews with survivors and families involved in the 228 Incident, and her research into Taiwan's history. Ryan's writing can be regarded as a way of searching for her mother's native place on the one hand. On the other hand, the publication of *Green Island* makes it possible for readers who have no knowledge of Taiwan to understand its history and culture. It can be a step toward Taiwan being recognized globally through literature.

Speaking of the characteristics of Taiwanese American literature as a subcategory in Asian American literature, the production and circulation of *Yangmei Trilogy* and *Green Island* are transnational and cross-cultural. Not only do the novels carry the symbolic meanings and themes frequently found in Asian American literature, such as cultural difference, identity construction, hybridization, marginalization, and multiculturalism, etc., these two novels also create a space for Taiwanese American literature, and contribute to the cultural intervention in the field of Asian American literature via situating the history of Taiwan in their narratives, thereby highlighting the position of Taiwanese immigrants in the United States and teasing out the political relation and cultural interaction between Taiwan and the United States. They speak for the multilingual production of Asian American literature and the multilayered political embodiment of domestic and world histories as well as transnational migration.

Immigrant literature, such as *Yangmei Trilogy* and *Green Island*, contributes to the production and the circulation of Taiwanese culture and history. Writers familiar with the immigrant experience, such as Joyce Huang and Shawna Yang Ryan, play key roles as agents in writing, translating and promoting Taiwan in

literature. Through the employment of local knowledge, immigrant perspectives, and using the approach of world history, representing Taiwan in literature as a project of repositioning Taiwan globally can be said to contribute to the agency of smaller countries like Taiwan and increase their visibility on the global scale. Cultural production combined with the transnational migration opens the possibility to connect and compare Taiwan with other parts of the world through a relational approach.

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