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Revisiting Local History and Ghostly Memory in Shawna Yang Ryan's *Locke 1928*

By Chia-Rong Wu

Since the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in 1975, ghost storytelling has become a notable trend in Chinese American literature. Decades later, the ghost narrative established by Kingston still surfaces in Chinese American writing, often connected with the idea of return. Generally speaking, the concept of 'return' not only refers to the Chinese spirits coming back, but points to the travel of the Chinese American subjects back to spectral China. The ghost tradition discussed here has been constantly shaped and reshaped in the twenty-first century. In this light, 'change' seems to be a necessity to shun the shadow of Kingston. With a focus on the changing process of Chinese American haunting, this article is drawn to Shawna Yang Ryan, a less-known, mixed heritage Chinese American writer. Ryan finds her own way of looking into the older Chinese American past in *Locke 1928*[1] (2007). Whereas Kingston and Amy Tan engage domestic haunting of family history with respect to the contemporary formulation of Chinese American identity, Ryan remains devoted to a specified locale set in the early twentieth century and provides an interracial vision of the ghostly past within the framework of Chinese American history. That said, this piece would fill in the lack of the research to date and explore the continuous spectral representation of Chinese diaspora in the context of Chinese America.

Shawna Yang Ryan explores a unique Chinese American haunting in her debut novel *Locke 1928*. Ryan's work can be taken as a response to Amy Tan's departure from Kingston beyond the domain of Chinese America in her novel *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), in which the Chinese American ghost tradition is turned into a unique narrative of haunting embedded in international travels and cultural (mis-)understanding outside the American soil. Tan's change of focus has paved the way for a new perspective of domestic haunting and global traveling. Whereas Tan's ghost storytelling gradually shapes Chinese American literature with a global consciousness, Ryan provides an exclusively local view of Chinese American

[1] *Locke 1928* has been re-published with the new title *Water Ghost: A Novel* by Penguin Press HC in 2009.

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haunting from the past. Ryan excludes such typical issues as mother-daughter relationship and autobiographical narrative. What she takes into account is an imaginative, supernatural revision of the traumatic history of Chinese America. In *Locke 1928*, Ryan deals with the haunting memories of early Chinese immigrants in local river town Locke, near Sacramento, California. To analyze Ryan's ghost storytelling, this article takes into account the historical backdrop of *Locke 1928* and examines the interaction between the local history of Locke and the cross-cultural memory of its residents. Then a parallel is drawn between the significance of Kingston's ghost storytelling and the elusive spectral traces in the novel. It is quite obvious that Ryan tries to relocate silenced and marginalized Chinese (American) women from a feminist angle. It is also important to discuss the drastic solution to the problems of the traumatic history and repressed memory by means of the ghostly return, reunion, and revenge. Through this ghost haunting story, Ryan leads her readers to re-examine a particular local history in tandem with the diasporic memories of the first-generation Chinese Americans in the town of Locke, 1928.

Born in 1976 in Sacramento, California, Ryan is a second-generation Chinese American. Ryan's mother is a Chinese mainlander from Taiwan, while her father is a white American. As a mixed heritage writer, Ryan has provided her unique insight into the literary arena of Chinese American haunting. It is worth noting that Ryan has a strong attachment to her American homeland in response to the ghostly diasporic memories of the past. As Ryan states,

> I started thinking about those types of stories, and I thought I would do something local, being from Sacramento, but I didn't know much about the history of the Chinese in Sacramento. I remembered coming to Locke as a kid, and suddenly there was a "click." I had thought of it as this place where we went on weekends and my parents would buy me a little toy. Suddenly, there was a connection, that this whole area, the Delta, has a really rich Chinese history. (qtd. in Reid)

This is the reason Ryan chose the small Sacramento delta town as the local setting of her novel. As mentioned earlier, *Locke 1928* centers on the local history and the cross-cultural memory of Locke back in 1928. Such issues as the early Chinese American life and the Exclusion Act (1882-1943) are thus brought to the fore. Ryan stages such characters as Richard Fong (Fong Man Gum), the manager of the Lucky Fortune Gambling Hall, the brothel madam Poppy See (Po Pei), the white prostitute Chloe Virginia Howell, and the Chinese pastor's wife Corlissa Lee, who is the only non-prostitute white woman in town. Though bearing the ghostly memories of the

haunting past, these characters find their own ways to survive in the misty town founded by Chinese immigrants. Their lives are doomed to be changed forever by three mysterious Chinese boat-women who dramatically arrive in Locke by a boat on a spring morning of 1928. These women claim that they crossed the sea from faraway China with the aid of smugglers. One of them is Richard Fong's wife Ming Wai, who was left behind in China ten years ago. Most importantly, the three women later appear to be disturbing water ghosts in search of opportunities of revenge and rebirth by drowning the living.

In this novel, the mysterious elements are skillfully channeled into the historical setting. Ryan attempts to deal with the relationships between sex and desire, loss and return, past and present in a mix of history and fiction. While historical scripts and ghostly memories intermingle in the novel, Ryan blurs the border between the public and the private, and further provides a personal retrospection of history and a haunting revision of memory. Critics have widely discussed the conflicts between the public history and the private memory; however, history and memory can be placed side by side in discussing the reconstruction of the past. According to Aleida Assmann, "Memories […] can help bridge the gap between the abstract academic account, on the one hand, and the intensely painful and fragmented personal experience, on the other" (262). "History and memory," Assmann continues to argue, "are no longer considered to be rivals and more and more are accepted as complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past" (263). In this sense, memories indeed complete the historical discourse in the process of recapturing the past. Thereupon Ryan's writing presents a coalescing of history and memory.

It is worth considering that Ryan takes into account supernatural elements and ghostly images in shaping the historical fiction. In this case, ghost haunting is entangled with collective reminiscence and cultural repression. Whereas the upsetting memories of Ryan's characters surface time and again, the water ghosts serve as the embodiment of cultural anxieties in response to the traumatic history. From this perspective, Ryan's ghost narrative can be wedded to Kingston's in many aspects, especially the figuration of the water ghosts as female avengers. Thus, it can be beneficial to compare Kingston's and Ryan's ghost storytelling in feminist and cross-cultural contexts.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston demonstrates varied faces of ghosts and creates the haunting effects of the past and present. Interestingly, Kingston expresses spectralized Chineseness as represented in the stories of the No Name Woman and the Sitting Ghost. By means of the figuration of these haunting shadows, Kingston empowers her female characters in defiance of the haunting past and turns them into

women warriors against the oppressive present. Through the inspiration from and resistance to ghosts, Kingston's female warriors reveal their power to survive in a cross-cultural world of Chinese and American ghosts. Moreover, ghost haunting channels the in-betweenness and rootlessness of Chinese Americans. Therefore, the border-crossing ghosts in this autobiographical fiction serve to locate the historical remains, to highlight the racial oppression, and finally, to bridge the past of China and the present of Chinese America. At the end of the novel, the leading character, Maxine, finds her own way to be a woman warrior comparable to Fa Mu Lan and her mother, Brave Orchid.

It is significant to note that Kingston wraps all these historical and political struggles in autobiographical and fictional narratives. Both *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* are dominated by the first-person voice (the narrator and the leading character combined). This Chinese American autobiographical narrative can be entwined with "the representation of cultural authenticity, the production of reliable or authentic knowledge about Chinese America" (Madsen, "Chinese American Writers of the Real and the Fake" 259). Away from Kingston's autobiographical voice, Ryan's approach to "authenticity" relies on her re-writing of historical accounts along with a domestic sense of locality.

In addition, while *The Woman Warrior* discloses Maxine's search for her cross-cultural identity in face of ghostly figures, Ryan's *Locke 1928* is not associated with identity crisis but with politics of history and memory via the ghostly return of the past. Unlike *The Woman Warrior*, *Locke 1928* neither unfolds in Ryan's autobiographical tone nor is based on her family history. Actually, Ryan relies on her personal experiences, research, and imagination to recount the historical incidents and spectral appearances in Locke of the early twentieth century. In the late summer of 2000, Ryan visited the rural town of Locke, where less than one hundred people resided. She paid three hundred dollars in rent and lived in an old apartment there for one month. During her stay in Locke, she never saw any ghosts, but she did encounter unexplainable incidents like hearing footsteps from downstairs when she was alone in the remodeled house, which was a gambling hall long time ago.[2]

Even though most residents in Locke nowadays are not Chinese, the historical and cultural heritage of early Chinese Americans is still preserved in the landscapes of Locke. Therefore, Ryan's stay there offered significant resources for her to blend the history, memories, and spectral elements of Locke. This profound fusion turns out to be Ryan's individual reminiscence, or re-interpretation, of a specific locale.

[2] For more information, please refer to Dixie Reid's "Spirit of the Past: Sacramento Native Shawna Yang Ryan Grounds Her First Novel in the Town of Locke" in *The Sacramento Bee* 6 May 2007.

Critic Dydia DeLyser has provided an insight into the connection between historical sites and visitors:

> Historical sites and places of memory such as ghost towns are, at least ostensibly, landscapes of the past, but such landscapes […] are seldom left to the ravages of time. Rather, they are more often expressly set up to be interpreted by the visitors in the present. But as these […] landscapes are reinterpreted by each generation of viewers, they can convey new meanings and new associations […]. (606)

From this perspective, Ryan as a visitor and writer is actually instilling "new meanings and new associations" into the local history of Locke when the historical text is overlaid with fictional and spectral traces. In "Prologue: The Founding (1915)," Ryan adds imaginary pictures to the fire that burnt down the original Chinatown and led to the founding of Locke river town afterwards. Interestingly, Ryan imagines the fire caused by an anonymous woman who is cooking in the kitchen:

> She thought of them as she lit the oil stove. The newspaper that covered the wall behind the stove was ready to be replaced. Yellowed already, torn, grease-splattered to a high sheen—it had done its job.
> […]
> She stood up and slid her chopstick along the thick black pan and the sweep of her hand was met by the sudden sweep of flames up the wall, up the newspaper. […] The fire spread across the wall, licked at the ceiling. (1-2)

At the opening of the novel, the anonymous woman starts the fire by accident and leads to the founding of the new Chinatown of Locke. Both the newspaper and the fire that occurred in 1915 are fashioned as historical markers. While the fire burns down the original Chinatown, the newspaper might have "done its job," thus leaving space to the fictional and the supernatural. What ensues is a series of spectral incidents within a historical framework of Locke.

We need to bear in mind that *Locke 1928* is a ghost story despite its conspicuous historical background. The first chapter of the novel is set on the morning of the Dragon Boat Festival in 1928. Along with the Chinese New Year and the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival is one of the most important holidays celebrated in Chinese communities. On this day, Chinese people pay homage to Qu Yuan, a renowned Chinese poet and minister of Chu during the

Warring States Period. To honor this patriotic poet, people hold dragon boat racing and eat 'zhongzi', a Chinese rice food wrapped in bamboo leaves. Although this festival is supposed to honor the dead, in Ryan's novel it turns out to be a ritual that conjures up haunting memories and water ghosts. Therefore, the collective nostalgic attachment to faraway China is transformed into recurring nightmares from which the townsmen of Locke suffer.

Moreover, Ryan's ghost narrative is loaded with the ghostly memories and the images of water ghosts in a locale without symbolic father figures. While the fog drifts around the river town right before the arrival of the three boat-women, an unbearable smell reminds the male protagonist Richard Fong of the death of his father back in China years ago:

> It is a gesture of honor propelled by the stink.
> The smell is a prelude. For Richard, it hearkens back to a hot August day fifteen years past: his father's body laid out in the parlor, puddles of melted ice beneath him. Mourners dressed in white, all windows open, but even the crossbreeze couldn't undercut the humidity. (16)

There are two issues to note here. First, the smell of the dead and the sea is adapted into the prelude of the upcoming ghost haunting. It opens up the following disturbing incidents with respect to spectral traces. Like the horrible smell, the sense of haunting pervades the entire town and lingers on even at the end of the story. Second, the concepts of the fatherless and the powerless father occupy places of particular importance in fashioning Chinese American heritage. By that means, the fatherless Richard to a great extent corresponds with the symbolically fatherless state of early Chinese immigrants. Additionally, Howar Lee, the Chinese Christian preacher, acts as an inconsequential father figure that fails to exorcize the water ghosts and stop the final tragedy. The only father-like figure may be Uncle Happy, who is an experienced and respected farm laborer. Yet, he is just an aged, dying uncle, rather than a strong father that fathers.

While narrating the fatherless town of Locke with historical and fictional elements, Ryan puts emphasis on her female characters. According to Ryan,

> I wanted to write a story about Chinese women that took place in the past, because a lot of books I was reading had Chinese women characters but took place in the present day. And I said, where is the Chinese American woman in history? That's when I discovered the immigration laws – the exclusion acts – and understood why there were so few stories

> about Chinese women in America in the late 1800s, early 1900s. The laws kept them from being here. (qtd. in Reid)

Whereas the American laws kept Chinese women from entering the United States in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, Ryan makes possible the representation of the silenced and abandoned Chinese women through ghostly memories in this historical fiction. Indeed, there is no linear timeline in this work while history and memory are intermingled and shift back and forth in fragments. Further, ghost haunting seems to be another source to upset the chronology of history. In the words of Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, "[H]aunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of linear temporality: there may be no proper time for ghosts" (1). Buse and Stott also write,

> Ghosts arrive from the past and appear in the present. However, the ghost cannot be properly said to belong to the past, even if the apparition represents someone who has been dead for many centuries, for the simple reason that a ghost is clearly not the same thing as the person who shares its proper name" (11).

As a result, both ghostly memories and spectral figures function as essential agents to cross the lines between past and present, fact and fiction, as observed in Ryan's *Locke 1928*.

To re-narrate the local history of Locke, Ryan does not depend on one singular narrator or perspective. Instead, she carefully delivers different male and female characters' views. Richard's attitude towards the undesirable, ghostly China represents the collective memory shared by Chinese immigrants who left their wives and family behind while pursuing their American dreams. Besides Richard's cultural anxiety, the author stresses the haunting memories of her female characters. Interestingly, Ryan even incorporates the memories of white female characters in reconstructing the local history, thus providing a cross-racial angle beyond the traditional viewpoint of Chinese immigrants. Throughout the entire novel, the memories of Poppy See, Corlissa Lee, and Chloe Virginia Howell are projected as fragments and interpolated into the historical flow. No matter where they go, their disturbing memories trail along behind them, just like haunting ghosts.

First, the Chinese brothel madam Poppy See should be emphasized while discussing ghostly memories. She is figured as a mysterious psychic who is able to access the supernatural world and has prophetic dreams/premonitions of ghost haunting. In other words, Poppy See stands as a medium between the living and the

dead, between the memories of ghostly China and those of haunting America. After leaving her bloodsucking husband, Poppy See runs the only whorehouse in the town of Locke. She is deeply in love with Richard, who leaves her for the young white prostitute Chloe. Yet Poppy See seems to be the only character in the novel that really cares about Richard. She foresees the potential danger of the three boat-women and tries hard to prevent the tragic end of Richard. She remembers her encounter with a river ghost in China in 1910 when she was still named Po Pei. This water ghost is actually her dead neighbor, Old Chan's wife. It seems that Old Chan's wife has a secret adulterous affair with Po Pei's father. After her death, Old Chan's wife becomes a water ghost and returned to haunt her secret lover. In one scene, young Po Pei witnesses the inexplicable reunion of her father and the water ghost:

> [The water ghost and Po Pei's father] embraced, and even in the small touch, Po Pei saw the transference of her father's essence. He grew dimmer as the woman shined. He was losing his yang ch'i, his male essence, his life-light. His yin had grown unbalanced—too much darkness, too much moon, too much female. (155)

The ghost haunting here is not unlike an extended version of the feminist revenge taken by Kingston's No Name Woman, who drowns herself in the drinking well. Furthermore, we can surely find a parallel between Old Chan's wife in China and the three water ghosts in the town of Locke. This spectral encounter ends with the young Po Pei's successful exorcism against the ghost. She burned the hell notes, the paper money for ghosts, to catch the attention of the female specter. Then she slices open a hen's neck and creates a mysterious vacuum from the wound that sucks in the ghost. Finally, the ghost is confined in the hen which becomes "a vessel for the ghost of a slighted lover" (156). Similar to Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*, Po Pei defeats the haunting ghost. From this angle, Po Pei in China might be a great exorcist. However, she loses her power of wizardry in America, and only her psychic premonitions remain.

Besides Poppy See, white women Corlissa and Chloe provide diverse angles for readers to observe the lives of early Chinese Americans. In *The Woman Warrior*, the female protagonist Maxine encounters a number of racialist ghosts who are actually human but are loaded with oppressive and haunting traits. Unlike these negative ghost figures, Corlissa and Chloe are treated as major characters and victims. Many Chinese American literary works have coped with the predicaments of Chinese American women. Yet, few have touched upon how white women suffer in Chinese American communities. As wife of the local Chinese preacher, Corlissa

always acts as a good-hearted and helpful figure to other townspeople. She is the one who helps to accommodate and educate the two boat-women So Wai and Sai Fung. Yet, Corlissa's identity as an outsider has been determined when she chooses to marry a Chinese man. No matter how hard Corlissa tries to get along with the others, she seems to be isolated and marginalized like a white ghost in this Chinese American community.

As for Chloe, she also has to live with her memories of the haunting past. When she first arrives in Locke, she is about to deliver a baby. Back then Poppy See serves as her midwife. Unfortunately, Chloe's baby dies at birth. This scene is narrated in recurring flashbacks from three different perspectives. Each perspective adds and modifies some details of Chloe's delivery and the death of the baby. At this point, the attributes of fluid memories are highlighted. Ghostly memories come and go, shift and linger. What remains the same is the endless haunting. Examining the ghostly memories of Poppy See, Corlissa, and Chloe, we are able to better understand how individual consciousness can be projected onto haunting memories, and vice versa.

In addition to the haunting memories of women, Ryan is fascinated by the images of ghosts and thus stages three ambiguous boat-women that haunt the entire town. Ryan reports, "I was determined to have Chinese women in my story and decided that a nice metaphor for that would be ghosts" (qtd. in Reid). Employing ghosts as the key metaphor, Ryan presents a profound relationship between the repression and the return in a psychoanalytic sense. As Buse and Stott argue, ghost haunting can be adopted as "an expressive symptom of the phenomena that bear upon an unsettled psychic life" and as "symbols of lack, disquiet, and unmediated tragedy" (13). While dealing with the issues of diasporic memories and local history of Locke back in 1928, Ryan focuses on the unjust treatments imposed on early Chinese immigrants. Due to the Exclusion Act, most Chinese men were unable to send for their wives living in China. For those wives who were left behind, their hope was turned into endless wait and despair.

Keeping in mind the history of those abandoned and forgotten Chinese wives, Ryan narrates the arrival of the three boat-women, Ming Wai, So Wai, and Sai Fung. If ghosts represent an intervention on history from the past, the three boat-women, or water ghosts, serve as the haunting embodiment of the collective trauma shared by the forgotten. In short, they become recurring nightmares to the living. Ghost haunting here not only requests remembrance but also seeks revenge. In traditional Chinese ghost stories, water ghosts are usually trapped in a specific body of water and have no access to reincarnation until they drown their human substitutes in water. Ryan's water ghosts seem to be scarier in that they are described as specters

with physical bodies that float across the vast Pacific Ocean for the taste of revenge and the opportunity of rebirth in Chinese America.

In *Locke 1928*, Ming Wai is identified as a haunting nightmare Richard cannot get rid of. As a matter of fact, Poppy See, in a premonition, already sees Ming Wai following Richard before the arrival of the ghost boat:

> Behind Richard follows a woman in an old-style dress—snapped-closed collar, sleeves falling wide like bells and, beneath the embroidered hem of her dress, tiny bound feet. Against the harsh outlines of Richard's suit, the woman is so delicate she follows like an echo to a sound. (7)

This prophetic vision indeed foreshadows the coming of Ming Wai along with the other two boat-women. Moreover, the tension between the husband and the ghost wife resembles the bond between Chinese immigrants and the cultural heritage of faraway China. What is repressed, what is forgotten, and what is left behind would come back to trail and haunt the subjects, "like an echo to a sound."

Additionally, Ryan makes clear the connection between Ming Wai and memory. As Ryan puts it, "[Richard] lets [Ming Wai] rest her hand on his arm. Her touch seems unreal, and it's very light—light as a memory, which, for a moment, Richard is sure it is" (22). At this point, the spectral representation of Ming Wai as memory conveys uncanny feelings of the male subject. Though not fully unpacking the enigma of the uncanny, Sigmund Freud does elaborate the potential association between the uncanny and the repressed: "It may be that the uncanny ['the unhomely'] is something familiar ['homely', 'homey'] that has been repressed and then reappears, and that everything uncanny satisfies this condition" (152). In this regard, Ming Wai represents the surfacing of the once-familiar but repressed memory that returns to haunt the living. Moreover, the sexual act Ming Wai performs on Richard turns out to be the ultimate ritual of ghost loving and haunting:

> [Ming Wai] licks him and sucks on him and he feels like he's getting weaker. […]
> This is what they warn in the stories—women can steal your strength, your essence. […] He is unsure what it is, but is sure he is losing is. […] When it is over, when he opens his eyes again, she is above him, smiling. She seems to glow—her cheeks are flushed, her eyes shine like wet ink. (122-3)

This sexual scene reminds readers of the ghostly return and deadly embrace of

Poppy See's neighbor, Old Chan's wife. Also, it demonstrates the empowerment of the female ghost over the sexually potent Richard, who manipulates Poppy See and Chloe as his personal play dolls.

Like Ming Wai, So Wai and Sai Fung are wandering water ghosts in search of their human substitutes. Their arrival has a strong impact on the local bachelor culture. In Ryan's account, "The town had a few such men: split and living two lives—one in China, through paper, with a wife remembered only through a photograph, and one in America with flesh and blood" (190). Fifty-two bachelors in the town of Locke end up assiduously courting the two boat-women even though So Wai is a married woman searching for her lost husband who is later confirmed dead in the United States. As Huntley has it, "Chinese families were practically legislated out of existence in the United States, and a 'bachelor culture', comprised of men in their middle years or older, came to represent Chinatowns […]" (43). For the Chinese men who already settled in America and were unable to send for their Chinese wives, finding an alternative in local areas would be an easier choice for them. What these men have not realized at this moment are the spectral identities of these boat-women as well as the forthcoming destruction of the river town.

On the day of the Festival of the Weaving Maiden, which takes place on July Seventh in the Chinese lunar calendar, a party is held in the Lucky Fortune Gambling Hall to celebrate the holiday and Richard's reunion with Ming Wai. After all, it is a holiday for reunited lovers. At the party, So Wai sings a magical song of sadness that deeply touches all the guests, especially couples, and turns the entire town into a dreamy world of lovemaking. Ryan writes, "Song, like scent, is a wrist-flick to the past" (188). This song indeed makes Richard remember his early years, family, and wife Ming Wai. More importantly, this song makes him think of a forbidden word: "abandonment" (188). This word "abandonment" is tied up with Richard's identity as a Chinese immigrant. To come to the United States, he needs to leave everything behind. Yet, his haunting memory gets to him, while his earlier ambition fails him. At the tragic end of the story, both he and other townsmen cannot but pay for the act of "abandonment."

What follows the Festival of the Weaving Maiden is the Festival of the Hungry Ghost on July Fifteenth in the Chinese lunar calendar.[3] On this day, the heavy rain starts. Three days after the ghost festival, the levee breaks and the town of Locke is flooded. While Richard and Ming Wai are running away from the flood, Ming Wai falls into water. Richard remembers that Ming Wai cannot swim so that he jumps

[3] In *Locke 1928*, Shawna Yang Ryan mistakenly takes July the fifteen in the Chinese lunar calendar as the first day of the Ghost Month. Actually, the ghost month starts from July the first to the twenty-ninth in the lunar calendar. And the fifteenth is the so-called the Festival of the Hungry Ghost. The ghost festival activities include serving food on the tables and burning hell notes for the wandering hungry ghosts in order to keep the balance between the living and the dead.

into water to save her. As soon as Ming Wai calls Richard's Chinese name in the water, Richard realizes Ming Wai's spectral identity:

> Ming Wai whispers in [Richard's] ear: Fong Man Gum—breaking through the heartbeat quiet of water-rush and he wants to sleep to the sound of her voice.
> He opens his mouth to respond and water fills it. With a start, he realizes the incongruity of her voice with the underwater world. A water ghost. He has been living with a water ghost. […] A servant to the water god, exchanging her life for that of another. His. (220)

Out of a sense of guilt, Richard gives in to his deadly wife and dies. In this haunting climax, Ming Wai takes her final revenge, not simply draining Richard's male essence but also taking his life away, which is the only way for a water ghost to be reborn as a human. In doing so, she replaces her husband and regains a real physical body. It is quite obvious that Ryan attempts to justify Ming Wai's revenge through Corlissa's thought: "Corlissa wonders about the little redemptions in [Richard's] life, because she knows only of the larger shape: he lived, he sinned, he died" (224). That said, Richard's death is adapted into a performance of "redemption."

While the other two boat-women fail to drown their substitute, Corlissa, in the flood, Ming Wai succeeds in killing Richard and thus achieves what the other abandoned wives cannot. Whereas a great number of Chinese women were abandoned and forgotten by their husbands in the course of Chinese American history, some lucky Chinese women finally made it to America, but were rejected by their husbands who were already remarried. A similar case of Moon Orchid can be found in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Yet, in *Locke 1928*, the returning ghost wife punishes the husband who abandons her, and further grants herself a new life in America. In connection to the collective trauma of the abandoned Chinese wives left behind, these three boat-women ghosts embody the concept of spectralized Chineseness that some of the immigrants sought to shed in their attempt to assimilate in the new world. Such collective trauma can only be assuaged by the husband's redemption and/or death.

At the end of the novel, all of the major female characters learn to deal with their ghostly memories after Richard's death. Corlissa prays for Richard. Poppy mourns for him. And Chloe decides to leave Locke without saying goodbye to Corlissa's young daughter Sofia, with whom she may be secretly in love. As for Ming Wai, she looks at herself in the mirror with mixed feelings of triumph and sadness. She needs to face a new stage of life, memory, and history. As the novel

concludes, "[Ming Wai] has even started bleeding again. She watches red drops bloom in the toilet water and thinks that maybe someday another life will come out of her own" (230). In this regard, Ming Wai's identity as a water ghost is transformed into that as a capable mother with the power of giving birth. However, the final victory of Ming Wai does not bring an end to ghost haunting. Instead, the disturbing effects from the past still remain and linger in the present. In the long run, Ryan in *Locke 1928* revises the history along with ghostly memories, thereby transcending the past, present, and even future.

To conclude, the return of the horrifying ghosts embodies the regrets of early Chinese immigrants. From Ryan's feminist angle, men's regrets need to be acted out via the revenge taken by abandoned Chinese wives. Through water ghosts' revenge, Ryan re-writes the local history of Locke and re-negotiates the cross-cultural memory of early Chinese immigrants, thus helping readers reconsider the relationship between the past and the present, reality and myth. In this case, the spectral representation in Chinese American writing should be carefully analyzed in historical and cross-cultural contexts. Ghost haunting seems to keep reminding the living of issues such as the neglected past, cultural anxiety, and emotional loss. On the whole, Ryan provides more possibilities of localized ghost storytelling outside the autobiographical, mother-daughter, and Chinese-root-seeking framework established by Kingston. Besides, while Tan is departing from Chinese America and turning global, Ryan goes to the opposite pole and re-examines a specific period of Chinese American history. Chinese American haunting, thus, can be re-defined and re-evaluated in accordance with the changes made by *Locke 1928*.

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