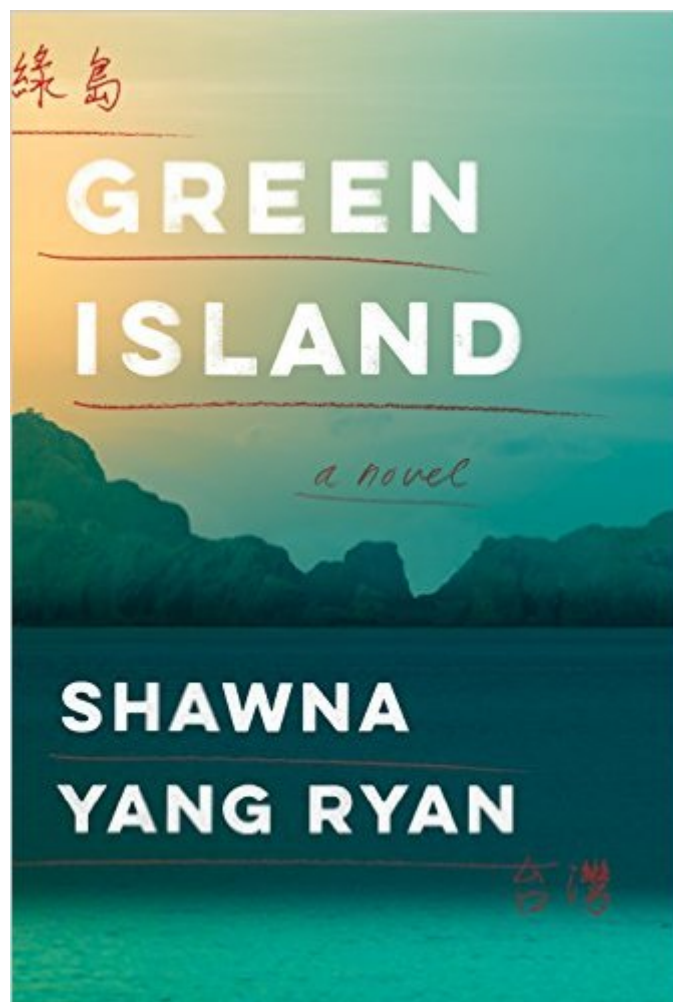


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# Green Island: A Novel



## Synopsis

Shawna Yang Ryan's propulsive storytelling carries us through a bloody time in Taiwanese history, its implications still reverberating today. The story is haunted by questions about whether Taiwan is a part of China or its own country, what the costs are of standing up for one's beliefs and by the choices made by one father and his daughter. *Green Island* is a tough, unsentimental and moving novel that is a memorial not only to the heroes, but also to the survivors.

• Viet Thanh Nguyen, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Sympathizer* A stunning story of love, betrayal, and family, set against the backdrop of a changing Taiwan over the course of the twentieth century.

February 28, 1947: Trapped inside the family home amid an uprising that has rocked Taipei, Dr. Tsai delivers his youngest daughter, the unnamed narrator of *Green Island*, just after midnight as the city is plunged into martial law. In the following weeks, as the Chinese Nationalists act to crush the opposition, Dr. Tsai becomes one of the many thousands of people dragged away from their families and thrown into prison. His return, after more than a decade, is marked by alienation from his loved ones and paranoia among his community—conflicts that loom over the growing bond he forms with his youngest daughter.

Years later, this troubled past follows her to the United States, where, as a mother and a wife, she too is forced to decide between what is right and what might save her family—the same choice she witnessed her father make many years before.

As the novel sweeps across six decades and two continents, the life of the narrator shadows the course of Taiwan's history from the end of Japanese colonial rule to the decades under martial law and, finally, to Taiwan's transformation into a democracy. But, above all, *Green Island* is a lush and lyrical story of a family and a nation grappling with the nuances of complicity and survival, raising the question: how far would you be willing to go for the ones you love?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Green Island is a sweeping history of Taiwan, portraying its brutal history from 1947 until 2003 through the eyes of an unnamed narrator who was born in 1947 on the eve of a brutal crackdown on the island. As a newborn baby, her father Dr. Tsai is arrested for speaking up for democracy at a local town meeting. He is arrested and disappears into the Green Island prison off the coast of Taiwan where he is tortured. Released ten years later a broken and scarred man, he seeks to regain a normal life. But the scars linger on touching all of his children, especially his baby daughter. The narrator marries and moves to America where her husband is involved in the democracy movement in Taiwan. But living in America doesn't protect her from the long arm of the dictatorial Chiang Kai-shek regime. I will not give away any details of the betrayals and repercussions that unfold through most of the story. But to this American who had little knowledge of the brutality of Chiang Kai-shek, a one-time friend to the US, I found it eye-opening. The story moves along at a good pace, and while the writing style is often pedestrian, I found it engaging enough to hold my attention through out.

Shawna Yang Ryan is one of the best writers of historical fiction working today. In her second novel she takes us back to the history of Taiwan and jumps off from the "2/28 Incident" that led to riots and massacres in the streets in 1947. Her characters' lives are torn apart by events both governmental and out of their hands. Follow this beautiful story as it spans the lives of a family through turmoil and transitions. Beautifully written, memorable, and full of new historical events I was entirely unaware of. Required reading.

This is a tough gem of literature taking us through three generations of Taiwanese history. Taiwan strives to be a country of its own, not just a part of China and this leads to bloody. conflict. At the book's beginning, Taiwan is under Japanese colonial rule, followed by Chinese Nationalist martial law, finally becoming a democracy. At the root of the story, is the survival of a family and the question of what price are you willing to pay for the safety and security of those you love. The story elves deeply into the issues and is well worth the reading.

"My mother Li Min's labor pains began the night that the widow was beaten in front of the Tian-ma

Teahouse." From this beginning of Green Island a family saga unfolds with most key moments impacted by events in the modern history of Taiwan. The novel delves deeply into the dilemma of the narrator and others who would prefer to avoid the dangers of protesting against a dictatorship, but whose lives would be affected anyway by the actions of their more politicized, or perhaps braver or more foolhardy, families. There is more romance than politics, and more about the difficulties of modern marriage than about the Americanization process for immigrants. For most readers this would be the first exposure to criticism of the Chinese Nationalists who were overthrown by the Chinese Communists after World War II. Having once read Hollington Tong's biography of Chiang Kai-Shek (which is laudatory), I pulled it out to refresh my memory. The Japanese were defeated in 1945 and the transfer of Taiwan to Chiang's government seemed like a minor affair. By then Chiang's government, which had started as a pro-democracy, anti-warlord movement, had become little more than a gang of warlords. In 1947 one of Chiang's generals became governor of the island and mistreatment of the native Taiwanese led to protests, which led to massive arrests, murders, and imprisonment. Chiang himself did not move to Taiwan until it was clear the mainland was lost in 1950. On the whole Green Island is the best book I have read in at least a year. It is competently and beautifully written. Interestingly Shawna Yang Ryan appears to have Chinese Nationalist rather than native Taiwanese ancestors.

Meticulously researched and carefully written, Green Island tells a complicated political and social history that many (most?) American readers simply do not know: Taiwan in the twentieth century (and by extension, into the 21st). Beginning with the brutal repression of the 2/28/1947 Incident/Rebellion/Massacre, Ryan studies the effects of brutal totalitarian authority on individuals, families, and a nation. The novel looks not only at Taiwan itself, but its extension through its secret service (the KMT) to the US in the 1960s-80s (from spying to extortion to assassination). The book is fiction, but its base is historical and documented, and it is beautifully grounded in the actions and objects of the "real" world. In reading the book, I was humbled by my ignorance (what was Nixon doing there? Why did Carter refuse recognition to Taiwan? Even today? Taiwan was a staging area for the Viet Nam war?), but in the end, while the tortuous strands of the history may still not be entirely clear to me, the enduring effects of the repression are quite clear. Given Taiwan's recent democratic election of its first female President, and the counterpoint of the arrest of a US Air Force officer (and Taiwan native) for spying for China, Green Island is a timely and engaging read. Recommend.

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