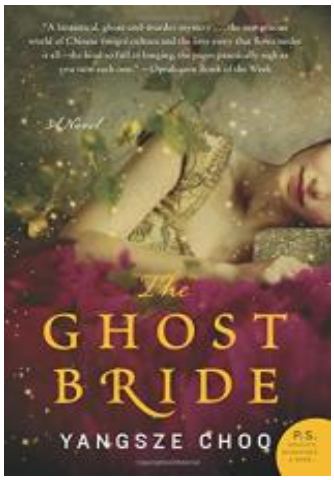
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The Ghost Bride

by Yangsze Choo



About the Book

A startlingly original voice makes her literary debut with this wondrous coming-of-age story infused with Chinese folklore, romantic intrigue, adventure and fascinating, dreamlike twists

One evening, my father asked me whether I would like to become a ghost bride?

Though ruled by British overlords, the Chinese of colonial Malaya still cling to ancient customs. And in the sleepy port town of Malacca, ghosts and superstitions abound.

Li Lan, the daughter of a genteel but bankrupt family, has few prospects. But fate intervenes when she receives an unusual proposal from the wealthy and powerful Lim family. They want her to become a ghost bride for the family's only son, who recently died under mysterious circumstances. Rarely practiced, traditional ghost marriages are used to placate restless spirits. Such a union would guarantee Li Lan a home for the rest of her days, but at a terrible price.

After an ominous visit to the opulent Lim mansion, Li Lan finds herself haunted not only by her ghostly would-be suitor, but also by her desire for the Lims' handsome new heir, Tian Bai. Night after night, she is drawn into the shadowy parallel world of the Chinese afterlife, with its ghost cities, paper funeral offerings, vengeful spirits and monstrous bureaucracy --- including the mysterious Er Lang, a charming but unpredictable guardian spirit. Li Lan must uncover the Lim family's darkest secrets --- and the truth about her own family --- before she is trapped in this ghostly world forever.

Discussion Guide

1. Perplexed by her father's absences and worried by finances and marriage negotiations, Li Lan wonders, "What was happening out in the world of men?...Despite the fact that my feet were not bound, I was confined to domestic quarters as though a rope tethered my ankle to our front door." How does Li Lan chafe against notions of femininity, and in what

ways does she rebel?

2. Malacca is a city settled by various ethnic groups over the centuries, with a long colonial history as well. The Chinese in Malaya, like Li Lan's family, keep their own practices and dress, but don't follow tradition as rigidly as in China. How does Li Lan benefit from this blending of tradition?

3. After Li Lan gives in to Amah's superstition and visits a medium at the temple, she observes a Chinese cemetery that has been neglected due to fear of ghosts: "How different it was from the quiet Malay cemeteries, whose pawn-shaped Islamic tombstones are shaded by the frangipani tree, which the Malays call the graveyard flower. Amah would never let me pluck the fragrant, creamy blossoms when I was a child. It seemed to me that in this confluence of cultures, we had acquired one another's superstitions without necessarily any of their comforts." What do you think the comforts of superstition are? As Li Lan interacts with the spirit world, does her perspective on superstition change?

4. Why is Li Lan drawn to Tian Bai when they meet? How do her feelings for him change over the course of the novel, and why?

5. The ghost world Li Lan enters is a richly imagined place governed by complicated bureaucracy. How does the parallel city reflect the world of the living, and in what ways is it different?

6. When Li Lan thinks that she has found her mother --- ?a second wife in the ancestral Lim household? --- she is shaken by how horrible she is. How does meeting her real mother, Auntie Three, help Li Lan understand her own family?

7. When Li Lan is a wandering spirit, able to observe from another perspective, what does she realize about herself and her world? Are there positive aspects to her time spent outside her body?

8. Li Lan thinks, "All who have seen ghosts and spirits are marked with a stain, and far more than Old Wong, I have trespassed where no living person ought have." How has Li Lan's time spent in the realm of the ghost world --- ?speaking with the dead, eating spirit offerings, seeing Er Lang's true identity --- changed her? Is it possible for her to go back to normal life?

9. When Er Lang proposes to Li Lan, he warns her, "I wouldn't underestimate the importance of family." Were you surprised by Li Lan's decision at the end of the novel? If you were in her shoes, do you think you would have chosen the same route, with its sacrifices?

10. Did you know anything about traditional Chinese folklore before reading THE GHOST BRIDE? What did you find fascinating or strange about the mythology woven throughout the novel, and the Chinese notions of the afterlife?

Author Bio

Yangsze Choo is the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE GHOST BRIDE (now a Netflix Original series) and THE NIGHT TIGER, a Reese?s Book Club Pick, and a Big Jubilee Read selection for Queen Elizabeth II?s Platinum Jubilee. She lives in California with her family and loves to eat and read (often at the same time). THE FOX WIFE and all previous novels would not have been possible without large quantities of dark chocolate.

Critical Praise

?Choo?s clear and charming style creates an alternate reality where the stakes are just as high as in the real world, combining grounded period storytelling with the supernatural.?

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