

The Cross-cultural Translation of Maugham's British Play in Hong Kong in the 1950s: A Study of the Translation of *The Sacred Flame* into *Xin Yan*

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Abstract:

William Somerset Maugham's 1928 play *The Sacred Flame* was translated and adapted into the Chinese play *Xin Yan* staged in Hong Kong in the 1950s. In this article, I examine how this British play was turned into cultural resources for Chinese intellectuals and dramatists to fight against feudalism rooted in China and Hong Kong. At the same time, I also discuss how "female sexuality" is shown in both the original and the adapted texts. In the first part of this article, I lay out the personal story of Maugham to examine how his life experiences shaped the theme of his work. Though *The Sacred Flame* is easily recognized as an example of melodrama, its main theme goes far beyond the typical plots of romance and marriage. In fact, it could be regarded as a subtle gay/queer text where Maugham poses a challenge to traditional family structure and heterosexual marriage. In the second part, through examining the Chinese translation of *The Sacred Flame*, I emphasize how the play was localized by making modifications to suit the Chinese context and finally performed as *Xin Yan* by The Chinese Drama Group of the Sino-British Club of Hong Kong in the 1950s.

Keywords: William Somerset Maugham, *The Sacred Flame*, *Xin Yan*, the Sino-British Club of Hong Kong, cross-cultural translation

The Cross-Cultural Translation of Maugham's British Play in Hong Kong in the 1950s: a Study of the Translation of *The Sacred Flame* into *Xin Yan*

William Somerset Maugham (毛姆1874-1965) was a renowned British novelist and scriptwriter and his playscript titled *The Sacred Flame* was written in 1928. According to the Chinese translator Fang Yu (方于1903-2002) who translated the French version of *The Sacred Flame* (*Le Cyclone*) into Chinese *Wuning Si* (毋寧死) in the 1930s, the play has been staged more than a thousand times in London and New York. Since becoming a big success in English-speaking countries, it has also been translated and widely performed in Germany and France. It was still very popular there and was highly praised in the drama fields of all countries. It got complimentary remarks for its fresh subject matter, as well as its witty storyline. Audience tended to be excited by the mysterious plots from the beginning to the end. (Fang 1) Yet, it has never been valued by scholars and in-depth research on this particular play has been under-researched. Therefore, this research paper focuses on the scholarly underestimated *The Sacred Flame* and I would like to discuss how it was translated and adapted into the Chinese play *Xin Yan* (心燄) that was staged in Hong Kong in the 1950s.

I position my research in the field of translation studies. According to Susan Bassnett, it is “a discipline that demands both close reading and broad cultural and historical knowledge, based as it is upon the premise that all texts are created in one context and are read in another. The figure of the translator, once seen as a marginal second-class writer has been revised so that the translator is seen as a (re)writer, as a creative artist in his or her own right. After all, it is the translator who acts as the voice of the original writer when that writer’s work is transposed into another language.” (Bassnett 2) While referring to the general practice in translation studies as mentioned, I will do a textual analysis of both the original text and the translated and modified versions in this paper. As the texts have been circulated in different countries at different period, I would like to investigate the cross-cultural interaction between these texts. Apart from giving an overview of the background and context of the original play, I discuss how the text has been creatively reinterpreted, modified and used by different scriptwriters and dramatists. Specifically, this paper focuses on addressing how an originally British play could be turned into cultural resources for Chinese intellectuals and dramatists to fight against feudalism rooted in China and Hong Kong. At the same time, I also discussed how female sexuality is shown in both the original and the modified texts. In the first part of this paper, I lay out the personal story of Maugham to examine how his life experiences shaped the theme of his work. Though *The Sacred Flame* was easily recognized

as an example of melodrama, its main theme went far beyond the typical plots of “romance and marriage”. In fact, it could be regarded as a subtle gay/queer text where Maugham poses a challenge to traditional family structure and heterosexual marriage.¹ In the second part, through examining the Chinese translation of *The Sacred Flame*, I examine how the play was localized with modifications that suit the Chinese context through the case study of *Xin Yan*, the translated and modified version performed by The Chinese Drama Group of the Sino-British Club of Hong Kong (香港中英學會中文戲劇組, hereinafter referred to as “Chinese Drama Group”) in the 1950s.

Part 1) Queering the British Play in the 1920s: Maugham and *The Sacred Flame*

Maugham’s Personal Experience of Love and Marriage

In *Straight Acting: Popular Gay Drama from Wilde to Rattigan*, the British scholar Sean O’Connor (1968-) began his discussion of Maugham’s works by using an illustration published in the British satirical magazine *Punch* in June 1908. (O’Connor 60) This image undoubtedly serves as a starting point for us to understand Maugham’s achievement. The illustrator presented the “ghost” of the British playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616) as the main character and placed him in the West End of London in June 1908. Four advertisements of upcoming performances are hanged on the wall behind him, all written by Maugham, including *Lady Frederick* (1907), *The Explorer* (1908), *Mrs. Dot* (1908) and *Jack Straw* (1908). Shakespeare, the dramatist of many generations before Maugham, appears jealous and uncomfortable in the scene when four of Maugham’s plays are staged at the same time. Bringing people from different generations together and associating Shakespeare with Maugham was simply an imaginative way to demonstrate Maugham’s achievement at the age of 34. However, regardless of the aesthetic quality of the plays as it is still debated among drama critics, we must at least recognize that Maugham’s play has gained wide popularity in Britain in the early 20th century.

Apart from gaining traction as a scriptwriter, Maugham’s involvement in a marriage dispute also caught much public attention. As early as 1913, Maugham

1 My PhD supervisors Prof. Lee Ou Fan and Prof. Cheung Lik Kwan met me on January 20, 2020. At the meeting, Prof. Lee pointed out that Maugham’s gay identity and his travel experiences with a male partner had significant influence on the content of his created works. This inspired me to come up with the argument of *The Sacred Flame* as a subtle gay/queer text in this paper. Special thanks should be given to both teachers.

had an affair with a married woman named Syrie Barnard / Wellcome (1879-1955). Syrie's husband Henry Solomon Wellcome (1853-1936) filed a formal divorce lawsuit in 1916 after discovering that Syrie was pregnant with Maugham's child. Maugham was then cited as the co-respondent in this "very ugly and very public divorce" and was forced by the Court to marry Syrie in 1917. (O'Connor 64-65) Though Maugham had a relationship with Syrie, he developed same-sex relationships with men from time to time and was explicitly close to Frederick Gerald Haxton (1892-1944). The Chinese scholar Qin Hong (秦宏1978-) pointed out that Maugham had already participated actively in gay organizations in London and New York in his college years. However, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), the renowned scriptwriter and role model of Maugham was imprisoned for his homosexual behavior in 1895 and the case led the British government to tighten controls on homosexuality. Maugham was even warned by police to behave properly and he did not openly disclose his sexuality anymore. Therefore, the heterosexual marriage he engaged in could be a cover for his homosexuality. After marrying Syrie, he traveled frequently with Haxton to avoid seeing his wife and even lived overseas for a couple of years. Maugham and Haxton's footprints reached the United States, Tahiti, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and their relationship lasted until Haxton's death in 1944. (Qin 87) Another scholar O'Connor also claimed that Maugham, Syrie and Haxton had an unhappy triangular relationship and Maugham's trips all over the world were just an attempt to avoid his tenacious wife. Maugham and Syrie's unpleasant marriage lasted for ten years and they eventually divorced in 1927. (O'Connor 65)

The Representation of Triangular Love and Unhappy Marriage in *The Sacred Flame*

The British critic John Randolph Whitehead (1924-1999) suggested that "marital infidelity and adultery" have always been Maugham's favorite themes in his works. (Whitehead 5) Maugham saw heterosexual marriage negatively and he once bluntly stated in an interview,

"A marriage, at best, is the most abnormal of relationships between man and woman. I refuse to believe that it was ever intended for man and woman to be bound together by a legal contract under one roof. It constitutes an invasion of privacy, an encroachment on individuality, the shattering of peace-of-mind, the interruption of independent thought and action, and the engulfment of an innocent human being in a bog of boredom." (Menard

He claimed himself as a “three-quarters queer” and said: “I tried to persuade myself that I was three-quarters normal and that only a quarter of me was queer—whereas really it was the other way round.” He also said to his openly gay nephew Robin Maugham (1916-1981), “there’s no point in trying to change your essential nature.” (R. Maugham 201) Heterosexual writers could write gay stories and the sexual orientation of a writer is not necessarily related to the content of his creations. However, if we take Maugham’s sexual identity into account, we can interpret the triangular love story of two men and one woman in *The Sacred Flame* as a representation of the writer’s personal experiences. Published in 1928, it was indeed Maugham’s first play written in the year after he got himself out of the unpleasant marriage. While Maugham’s plays have always been known for their comedic quality, this was the first that foregrounds moral and important social issues besides focusing on entertaining audience. (Whitehead 9)

The Storyline of *The Sacred Flame*

In this first part of my paper, I would like to discuss the representation of female sexuality in *The Sacred Flame* and how the story could overthrow our deep-rooted traditional marriage and family values. The overall structure of this three-act play is in line with the “classical unities (三一律)” of Western traditional dramas. The story took place within 24 hours in the Gatley House near London. The first act is set at night, the second act in the next morning and the third act depicts what happens half an hour after the second act. The play has four male and four female characters including Mrs. Tabret, Maurice Tabret, Colin Tabret, Stella Tabret, Dr. Harvester, Nurse Wayland, Major Liconda, and Alice. The widow Mrs. Tabret has two sons, the eldest son Maurice and the second son Colin. Maurice is married to Stella, while Colin is single. (See Figure 1) Major Liconda is a close friend of the Tabret’s family. Dr. Harvester and Nurse Wayland are respectively Maurice’s attending doctor and caregiver, and Alice is the family maid.

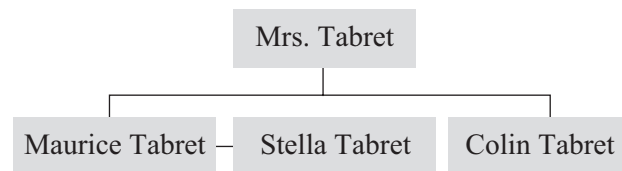


Figure 1

Maurice, a pilot in the air force, was injured in an accident the following year

after his marriage with Stella. The accident left him paralyzed from the waist down, making him permanently disabled and having to spend the rest of his life on a wheelchair. His younger brother Colin left home to run a coffee plantation in Central America a few years ago and he did not manage to meet his sister-in-law Stella before he left. Four years after the accident, Colin went home to visit his family and stayed there for almost a year. At the beginning of the first act, Colin and Stella just returned home from a date to the theater. They watched the romance opera *Tristan and Isolde* (1865) by Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813-1883) upon Maurice's recommendation. Though it is a tragic love story, Maurice and Stella watched it before they got engaged and this is why Maurice wanted his wife to remember some past sweet moments through watching the same show. After Maurice has fallen asleep, Stella meets Colin in private and they show strong affection toward each other.

The second act is set in the next morning. Maurice died of a drug overdose and Nurse Wayland was suspicious of the cause. She insists that he could not reach the medicine bottle due to his disability and he was probably drugged by someone in the house. Stella is suspected because she is pregnant with someone's child. As Maurice lost his sexual capacity after the accident and was infertile, he could not have been the father. Wayland believes that Stella had an affair and killed Maurice for the sake of her new lover. Half an hour later, in the third act, Stella confesses that she is pregnant with Colin's child and declares that they are in love, but Maurice's death had nothing to do with her. Mrs. Tabret suddenly explains to everyone that Stella is not the murderer, and she herself is the one who killed her son. She knows about the affair committed by Colin and Stella. Also, she has noticed that Stella is pregnant, and Colin would like to take her away. To save Maurice from suffering from the predictable loss of his beloved wife, as well as to support the forbidden love between Colin and Stella, Mrs. Tabret therefore drugged Maurice with an excessive dose of sleeping pills to end his life. Everyone is appalled by Mrs. Tabret's decision to perform such an act of "mercy killing" of his own son, but none insists to report it to the police. They agree to lie together, claiming that Maurice drugged himself. Nurse Wayland even promises to make up a story on leaving the medicine bottle for Maurice by mistake. In other words, Maurice's death would change from a case of "murder" to a case of "suicide". (W. Maugham 223-319) "Mercy killing" is undoubtedly the main theme of *The Sacred Flame*, at the same time, it deals with the struggle and tension between love and sexual desire of a married woman. If we regard it as a text with subtle gayness and queerness, Maugham's intention to depict the tragedy and misfortune of traditional marriage and family structures was a

challenge to the hegemonic position of compulsory heterosexuality.

The Frustrated Heterosexual Marriage and the Engagement of Forbidden Love

Throughout the play, Maugham put a sturdy effort to deliberate on the representation of female sexuality and there is an excessive display of intimacy. For example, while Maurice and Stella are alone in the first act, the stage instructions demand Stella give Maurice “a long, loving kiss” directly on the lips. In return, Maurice puts his arm around Stella’s neck. (W. Maugham 239) The intimacy scenes have repeatedly appeared and created a romantic atmosphere between Maurice and Stella. They are a happy couple despite Maurice being a disabled character and in a condition that is no different from a castrated man. Stella even openly calls Maurice her “husband only in name” after the accident to indicate they no longer have sex life. (W. Maugham 292) Maurice also feels sorry for not having a child with Stella and believes she would have the feeling of wasting her entire life without fulfilling women’s destiny of becoming a mother. (W. Maugham 247) A queer perspective would perhaps shed light on their sexless and childless relationship. According to Qin Hong’s research, stories on heterosexual marriage generally end happily with the presence of children, but gay dramas often resist this normative gender order by not including the theme of reproduction and child characters. She studied Wilde and Maugham and concluded that even though the subject matters of their comedies are based on marriage and family, they seldom wrote about children. This setting can be regarded as one of the criteria that proves the scriptwriters’ homosexuality. (Qin 87) Other scholars have also studied queer life and childhood. Sara Amed in “Happy Futures, Perhaps” stated that children in traditional heterosexual family are normally regarded as an essential element that makes a couple happy. Therefore, a queer life with no children is constructed as no real family life and the absence of children became the main cause of unhappiness. (Amed 165) Lee Edelman in *No Future* criticizes the excessive images of children in social and political campaigns. Children are often depicted as innocent and should be protected to maintain a better human future. As opposed to this logic of “reproductive futurism”, queerness can be radically associated with a negative force and offered an alternative way to fight against the normalization of linkage between children and future. (Edelman 3-6)

While the absence of children can be seen as an indicator of queerness in *The Sacred Flame*, I suggested the depiction of forbidden love is also a highlight. Huang Yonghua (黃永華), the translator of Maugham’s novel *The Painted Veil* (1924), highly commended Maugham’s exclusive writing style that foregrounds

personal feelings in his works. He explicitly pointed out that Maugham never wrote about people and things that he was not familiar with. After the ten-year torturous marriage, Maugham had finally developed a life-long hatred for his wife. Apart from that, the profound impact is the absent of “touching love and happy marriage” in his works. (Huang 2-3) Back to discussing the plots in *The Sacred Flame*, Stella and Colin claim to love each other deeply. Whether we should consider their relationship as a “touching love” as mentioned by Huang is debatable, but there is definitely no “happy marriage” in the play. Stella’s biggest misfortune in her marriage is her frustrated sex life and the fact that she is unable to get sexual satisfaction from her husband in name. Resonating with the plot, Maugham was also trapped in a triangular relationship. During his traveling years with his gay partner, it was obviously impossible for him to have physical contact with his wife and satisfy her sexual desire. At the same time, he probably did not find it necessary to receive sexual pleasure from her.

Female Sexuality that Transgresses Social Norms

According to the plot, Nurse Wayland has a one-sided love for Maurice. Therefore, she is very shunned for Stella’s affair with Colin. When she learns that Mrs. Tabret has approved their relationship, she is shocked and disappointed. On the contrary, Mrs. Tabret is always calm and peaceful. She says to Wayland in a caring tone that sexual instinct is as normal as hunger and the desire to sleep. A young and healthy woman like Stella deserves to be satisfied sexually. After Maurice’s accident, she comes to terms with the fact that he and Stella would no longer have a normal (sex) life like normal couples, hence, they are only trapped in a “false relationship” that should not be supported. She emphasizes that passionate love between a husband and wife anchored in sex and morality should not be imposed on individuals. Therefore, Stella and Colin should not be blamed because they are simply driven by basic human instincts. Given Mrs. Tabret’s is a decent and noble woman of high social standing, her advice to her daughter-in-law is quite unconventional. In fact, she even publicly admits that she fell madly in love with Major Liconda while married with two children when she was young. Since she had a similar experience as that of Stella and Colin, she understands their current situation and is especially considerate about their emotional predicament. Now recalling with regrets for her decision to restrain personal emotions and maintain loyalty to her family, she thinks Stella and Colin are more courageous than her to pursue love and their behavior is understandable and forgivable. (W. Maugham 249-303) Apart from Stella’s misfortune, Mrs. Tabret’s love for Major Liconda also

demonstrates that there is no such thing as a happy marriage. In the play, the only way for the heterosexual couple to fulfill their sexual desire is to leave unpleasant marriages and engage in forbidden relationships.

Going beyond Heterosexual Marriage

Maugham's ironic view on the so-called happy heterosexual marriage and family in *The Sacred Flame* serves as a foundation of the queerness and gayness in his text. The difficulties to abide by social norms for same-sex couples are similar to those of the heterosexual characters in the play. O'Connor, a scholar who specializes in gay drama, stated that many Western gay playwrights tried to represent the tensions and ambiguities of homosexual desire through heterosexual relationship as they are unable to examine homosexuality directly. Take Noël Coward (1899-1973)'s *Private Lives* (1930), Terence Rattigan (1911-1977)'s *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952) and Maugham's other play *The Constant wife* (1926) as examples, the married heterosexual couples in their stories all end up committing adultery. "The relationship between men and women is exposed as extraordinarily fragile. The ideal heterosexual love for which people die or kill, so relentlessly depicted in art and literature, is challenged. Romantic love is exposed as the stuff of fantasy or delusion." (O'Connor 21-22) Generally speaking, treating drama characters directly as the identification of the author is a superficial and narrow reading. O'Connor agreed that this interpretation devalues the imaginative and artistic achievement of the scriptwriters because they are supposed to have the ability to distance themselves from the characters. Having said that, some gay writers tend to identify with the female characters as it is impossible for them to publicly express their homosexuality. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) identified himself with the middle-age lady Blanche DuBois who has a rather complicated background. She not only engages in a marriage with a gay man and is in love with an underage student but also previously works as a prostitute. The most important thing is that she has a strong desire for young and sexually attractive male characters. According to Williams, he would like to "have men like Blanche does". (O'Connor 23)

For Maugham, he can be identified with Stella who is trapped in a triangular relationship and unfortunate marriage, unable to obtain sexual fulfillment from the married partner, and has finally developed a relationship with another male character. While Stella's affair with her brother-in-law is acceptable as she is simply following her essential nature, Maugham's decision to stay with Haxton instead of Syrie should not be criticized. His view on sexuality is reflected in the character:

One should fight for their sexual satisfaction and his or her sexual desire should not be suppressed in the name of morality. In general, Maugham displays a sympathetic treatment toward the female characters in this text. To understand his tendency, the context and the social atmosphere of his times should be considered. Feminism and the suffrage movement began to proliferate in the early twentieth century and there was an increase in public awareness of women's rights, especially concerning the rights to marriage, divorce, and own properties. Women started to question the once inviolable authority of their husbands and challenged patriarchal society. Their agendas were then developed and linked to the gay movement. All the oppressed groups, both women and gay men finally came together to fight for social change. (O'Connor 25) Therefore, Maugham made use of the figure of the suffering women to highlight the struggle faced by individuals who long for personal freedom. Specifically, he paid great attention to female sexuality as this could best reflect the social and moral norms imposed on individuals because of their gender. Taking all the above complex factors into account, it is reasonable for us to examine *The Sacred Flame* from a queer perspective. Given that this play has been translated and introduced to the Chinese-speaking community, it is worthwhile to consider how the queerness and gayness of the original text have been consumed and transformed.

Part 2) Localizing a British Play in the 1950s: The Sino-British Club Chinese Drama Group and *Xin Yan*

The Translation and Performance of *The Sacred Flame* in Mainland China

Chinese translator Fang Yu translated the French version of *The Sacred Flame* (*Le Cyclone*) into Chinese in 1933. The first and second acts can be found in volume 3, issue 11 of the journal *Wenyi yuekan* (*Literary Monthly* 文藝月刊) (May 1933) and the third act in issue 12 (June 1933). In July 1934, the complete play was published by Nanjing Zhengzhong Bookstore (南京正中書局). It was the first publication of Maugham's works in China in a book form. Fang Yu adopted the method of direct translation (文本直譯) and did not make any changes to the character settings and plots of the original text. The only slight modification she made was to take out some dialogues that had to do with female sexuality and sexual desire. For example, the episode where Mrs. Tabret describes Stella to Nurse Wayland as "young, healthy and normal" and comments that sexual instinct is a basic need as normal as our desires to eat and sleep. (W. Maugham 294) In Fang Yu's translation, she simply wrote "Shi dila nianji you qing, tige you zhuang, ta de rouyu bi lizhi qiang,

zhe shi wo dongde de (史狄臘年紀又輕，體格又壯，他的肉慾比理智強，這是我懂得的Stella is young and physically strong, her sexual desire is stronger than her reasoning, which I understand.)”. (Fang 97) Moreover, in the original text, Nurse Wayland argues against Mrs. Tabret’s view and criticizes that “the modern world is obsessed by sex”. She says people can survive without having sexual satisfaction but not without food and sleep. (W. Maugham 294-295) The above dialogues cannot be found in Fang Yu’s translation. It is difficult to verify her reason to remove them. However, at least she was capable to keep Maugham’s idea of depicting a female character with sexual instinct rather than simply dismissing it.

In the 1930s and 1940s, while Chinese audience could read *The Sacred Flame* in Chinese, they came to know about this play through stage performances. A drama critic named Long Ling (龍靈) once recalled his experience watching dramas in the Mainland China. He mentioned that he had watched the performance of Weiming Jushe (未名劇社) in Guangzhou around 1936. The play was called *Shensheng de Mure* (神聖的母熱*The Sacred Mother Love*) instead of *The Sacred Flame*. Performers included Tan Guoshi (譚國始), Huang Huifen (黃惠芬), and Lei Haoran (雷浩然). Later in the 1940s, Long also watched different drama groups performing the same play under the name *Shengsi Lian* (生死戀*Love Affairs*). Although it is difficult to trace performance information of the relevant troupes, we can still understand them through rare stage images published in old journals and magazines.

Take the Shanghai Spring Performances Showcase (上海春季聯合公演) held by Shanghai drama troupes in 1937 as an example, the Sishi niandai Jushe (四十年代劇社Forties Theatre Drama Club) performed *Shengsi Lian* from March 30 to April 3, with Sun Shiyi (孫師毅) as the director. The actors included Wang Ying (王瑩), Jin Shan (金山), Liu Qiong (劉瓊), Lan Lan (藍蘭), He Wei (何為) and Zong You (宗由). As shown in the styling photos of the main characters and the stage images published in *Lianhua huabao* (聯華畫報), some of them wore wigs and were dressed in Western clothes. It is obvious that the troupe adhered to the British setting of the original text and did not make any changes to adapt it to the local contexts. Fudan Jushe (Fudan Drama Club復旦劇社) used Fang Yu’s translation and performed the play in 1939. Directed by Wu Minzhi (吳仞之), the play was also staged in a Western setting. The troupe shared the same intention with Sishi niandai Jushe to keep the original Western background.

From an Unfortunate Marriage to Anti-feudalism

Maugham’s work entered China before 1949, but he was not well known by the

general public as much as in his home country. According to Qin Hong, there has been no complete and systematic translation of his works in China. She believed that Chinese translators in the early twentieth century were not interested in his works because readers tended to accept works solely according to Chinese cultural traditions, thinking patterns, and practical needs. (Qin 6) At that time, China was frequently at war and the entire country was often in a state of chaos. Chinese intellectuals who usually worked as translators of Western literary works were picky on the subject matters. In their point of view, Chinese people were already busy dealing with national crises and what they needed were some compelling, powerful and revolutionary works that could help develop their country into a better living place. Therefore, works foregrounded by important political and social issues were always favored. For example, *A Doll's House* (玩偶之家1879) written by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (易卜生1828-1906) was introduced to China during the May Fourth period. The run-away female character Nora (娜拉) in the play can be associated with the awakening of women's consciousness and be read as a symbol of individual freedom. Moreover, the play was interpreted as a challenge to the deep-rooted "fengjian (封建)" social ideology as it calls for a normative family order being restructured by weakening the power of the father or husband over women and children.

We cannot say Maugham completely avoided revolutionary subject matters because *The Sacred Flame* does discuss the moral and social issue of mercy killing and present an unconventional view on female sexuality. Nevertheless, Maugham did show less interest in handling political and social topics in great depth as he was most interested in writing about the ways in which individuals struggle in their marriage and family life. Even if that was not Maugham's intention, *The Sacred Flame* was frequently introduced as an "anti-feudalism drama (反封建道德戲)" by Chinese translators and readers in the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, any other non-revolutionary subject matters in his plays were not mentioned. When the Fudan Jushe published its upcoming performance schedule in newspapers in 1939, both *The Sacred Flame* and *A Doll's House* were listed under the "country-rescuing drama campaign (救難演戲運動)". Same as *A Doll's House*, *The Sacred Flame* was interpreted as having similar concerns of individual freedom and served as a form of powerful resistance to the traditional Chinese family order. Thus, it fitted perfectly in the trend of anti-feudalism in China. In other words, its awareness of problematic heterosexual love and marriage was modified and revised to fit into Chinese culture.

Bringing *The Sacred Flame* to Hong Kong and the Establishment of the “Chinese Drama Group”

There was no translation of Maugham’s works in mainland China between 1949 and 1978. (Qin 6) However, his plays appeared on the Hong Kong stage. In the 1950s, dramatists from South China came to Hong Kong under the name of the Chinese Drama Group. They actively participated in drama events in this British colony and adapted *The Sacred Flame* as the Chinese drama *Xin Yan* (心燄 *Flame of Heart*), which was performed three times on 29, 30, and 31 October 1954, at Queen’s College (皇仁書院) in Causeway Bay, and later performed for another three consecutive days from November 12 to 14 in the same year at Grantham College of Education (葛量洪師範學院) in Kowloon. (see Figures 2 to 4). The Chinese Drama Group was a literary interest group (文藝興趣小組) under “The Sino-British Club of Hong Kong (香港中英學會)” and all the founding members were Chinese intellectuals and dramatists committed to promoting friendship and understanding between the Chinese and the British through drama. Ma Jian (馬鑑 1883-1959) took up the role as the chairman; other key members included Chen Junyi (陳君葆 1898-1982), Jian Youwen (簡又文 1896-1978), Hu Chunbing (胡春冰 1907-1960), Li Xipeng (李錫彭 1908-2001), Tan Guoshi (1908-1982) and Huang Ninglin (黃凝霖).

The Chinese Drama Group was rooted in the Chinese Drama Movement. Yao Hsin-nung (姚莘農 1905-1991) (also known as Yao Ke 姚克) was an active member in this group and served as the scriptwriter and director of various performances. He wrote an article on post-war Hong Kong drama (戰後香港話劇) to highlight the historical development of Hong Kong drama. According to him, many Chinese dramatists moved to Hong Kong from Guangzhou after 1949 and they regularly participated in events organized by the Chinese Culture Group of the Sino-British Club of Hong Kong (香港中英學會中國文化組) to promote Chinese culture, and subsequently joined the Chinese Drama Group. Yao affirmed the contribution of the Chinese Drama Group and regarded its establishment as a turning point in the Hong Kong drama field. The Chinese Drama Group not only united all Hong Kong dramatists, but also constantly assisted the performances of various drama groups and local schools’ drama clubs. (Yao 45)

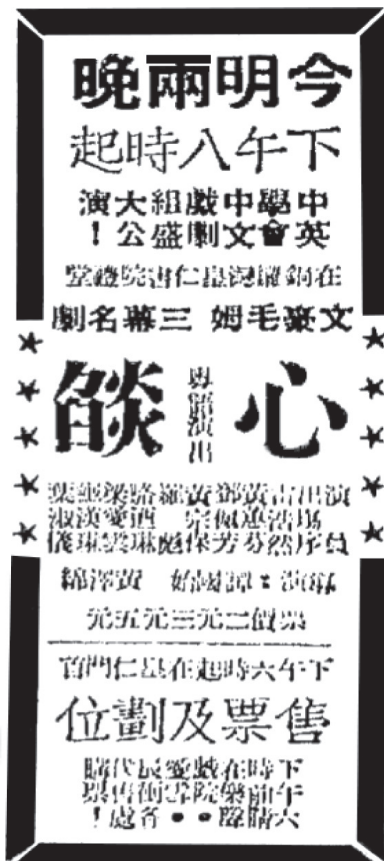


Figure 2: Advertisement of the performance *Xin Yan* on newspaper, *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, October 30, 1954.



Figure 3: A stage photo of the performance *Xin Yan* (1), *Sing Tao Daily*, November 4, 1954.

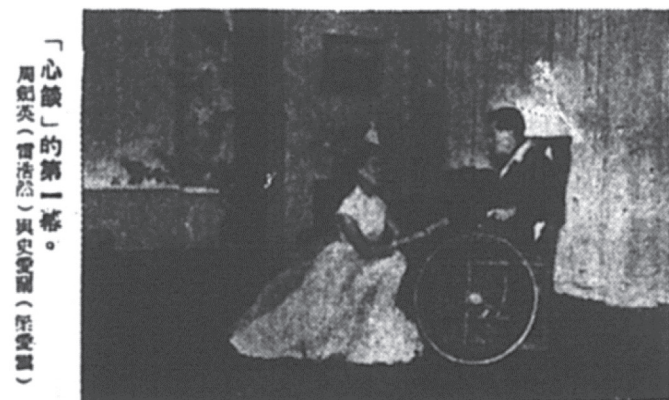


Figure 4: A stage photo of the performance *Xin Yan* (2), *Sing Tao Daily*, November 11, 1954.

Rescuing Chinese through Drama

In the 1930s, Xu Dishan (許地山1894-1941) invited Ma Jian to move from Beijing Yanjing University (北京燕京大學) to the University of Hong Kong (香港大學). (Dai 92-93) He returned to the mainland during the Japanese Occupation but came back to Hong Kong immediately after the war. He then became the Head of the Chinese Department at the University of Hong Kong where he held the position until his retirement in 1950. (Yang 2) After his death (died on May 23, 1959), Hu Chunbing wrote a eulogy in which he mentioned Ma Jian's most important duty in his late years being the chairman of the Chinese Drama Group. He held this position for more than seven years without any interruption; he not only gave a great effort to establish the group but also actively promoted, planned, organized numerous performances. In his last years, his major concern was the development of the group. (Hu 9) The above statement made by Hu Chunbing proves that Ma Jian had made a significant contribution to the Chinese Drama Group. His opinions on Hong

Kong drama can be seen from the group's publications, "*Xiju shuang zhoukan* (戲劇雙周刊*Drama Biweekly*)" and later "*Xiju zhoukan* (戲劇周刊*Drama Weekly*)" on the *Sing Tao Daily*. According to Ma Jian, "drama" is closely connected to nation (民族) and culture (文化). In his article titled "Wo dui Xiju shuang zhoukan de xiwang (我對戲劇雙周刊的希望My expectations for Drama Biweekly)" published on August 8, 1952, he claimed that we could understand the cultural standard (文化水準) of a particular country by its development of drama. Therefore, he spoke highly of this art form and had great expectations of dramatists. He believed that it was their responsibility to provide their audience with high-quality performances. After arousing people's interest in great drama works, the overall cultural standard in their community would be improved.

Ma Jian's attitude toward drama was no different from that of the Chinese intellectuals who cared about the national fate (國家民族命運) during the May Fourth Movement. In the second issue of *Drama Biweekly* published on August 22, 1952, Ma Jian continued to encourage Hong Kong dramatists to shoulder the social responsibility by educating the public through drama. Their ultimate goal was to promote Chinese culture and reform society and people's living (發揚中國文化, 革新社會生活). The Chinese Drama Group kept up with Ma Jian's thoughts on drama and started their first performance in May 1952 with the Chinese historical play (中國歷史劇) *Bixue Hua* (碧血花) (also known as *Mingmo Yihen* 明末遺恨, written by A Ying 阿英 1900-1977). This starting point shows that the group members were determined to promote China and Chinese culture through drama. Bao Hanlin (鮑漢琳 1919-2007), the chairman of the Chinese Drama Group in the 1960s, discussed past Hong Kong performances in an interview. He believed that *Bixue Hua* was the most frequently performed play by various Hong Kong drama groups in the 1930s. Since the political environment in those years did not allow the general public to openly express anti-war opinions, dramatists made use of ancient stories and historical events to satirize events in the present. Through *Bixue Hua*, they promoted hidden agendas to call for a rescue of their country (救國). (Zhang and He 199) According to Jiang Faxian (蔣法賢 1903-1974), the then chairman of The Sino-British Club of Hong Kong in 1952, the performance of *Bixue Hua* by the Chinese Drama Group was in fact a demonstration glorifying the Chinese traditional virtue of "loyalty, filial piety, and integrity (忠孝節義)" and "patriotism (愛國)".

Localizing *The Sacred Flame* as *Xin Yan*

Following the first attempt performing a Chinese play, the Chinese Drama

Group then began to translate British plays into Chinese and modified the original text to match the local Chinese context. In 1953, they first performed *You Jiashi de Ren* (有家室的人), which was adapted from *A Family Man* written by John Galsworthy (1867-1933). In the following year in 1954, the group presented Maugham's *The Sacred Flame* as the localized version *Xin Yan*. *Xin Yan* was directed by Tan Guoshi and Huang Zemian (黃澤綿), while Lei Haoran modified the script (he also played Zhou Jianyin 周劍英, the character corresponding to Maurice in the original text). As mentioned by Long Ling, both Tan Guoshi and Lei Haoran had performed *The Sacred Flame* in Guangzhou in 1936 under the name of Weiming Jushe. Though Tan and Lei were already familiar with the original play to a certain extent, they still faced a big challenge when adapting *Xin Yan* to a Chinese setting. As mentioned in the first part of this paper, *The Sacred Flame* was created undeniably in a specific British context and the story took place in London in the 1920s. When it was adapted into *Xin Yan* in Hong Kong in the 1950s, there was a crucial need to consider the locals' reception and standard of acceptance. In the article titled "Xie zai *Xin Yan* kaimu zhiqian (寫在「心燄」開幕之前 Before the Opening of *Xin Yan*)" published on October 28, 1954 in *Sing Tao Daily*, Tan Guoshi specifically acknowledged Lei Haoran's effort to set the story in a local setting. He declared that the new version was a perfect match to the Hong Kong local culture and it was a play "happening right here and now" (合乎此時此地). This view can be explained by the following three modifications.

Minor Adjustments to Suit the Chinese Context

Lei Haoran used Fang Yu's translation to modify the play and his biggest step was to change all the British characters to Chinese and the background from London to a modern city in the 1950s and 1960s. As the storyline remained unchanged, Lei Haoran captured the spirit of Maugham in the original version to a great extent. He slightly amended the content with reference to Chinese customs and traditions and removed elements that were deemed too Western for a Chinese audience. For example, Maurice and his doctor play chess in the first act, the corresponding characters in *Xin Yan* play Chinese chess instead. The original story arranged Maurice's younger brother Collin to run a business on coffee plantations in Central America, his corresponding character is involved in a gum tree business in Southeast Asia (南洋).

Characters in <i>Xin Yan</i> and the corresponding characters in <i>The Sacred Flame</i>		
<i>Xin Yan</i>		<i>The Sacred Flame</i>
Zhou Jianying	周劍英	Maurice Tabret
Zhou Jianlei	周劍雷	Colin Tabret
Mrs. Zhou	周老太太	Mrs. Tabret
Shi Ailan	史愛蘭	Stella Tabret
Dr. Jiang	蔣醫生	Dr. Harvester
Lawyer Cui	崔律師	Major Liconda
Nurse Lan	藍看護	Nurse Wayland
Yalian	亞蓮	Alice

The Deletion of two Orientalist Elements from the Original Text

Apart from the above minor adjustments, Lei Haoran removed all the dialogues on African killing customs and Indian soul rebirth belief in Maugham's original text. At the very beginning of the play, it tells us about a custom of killing elderly in an Africa tribe through Mrs. Tabret. She casually mentions her deteriorating physical condition to Major Liconda and confesses that she is no longer young and has been suffering from different health problems. She then talks about what some African tribes do to the elderly like her: they simply "take us to the river's brim and push us gently but firmly in." Liconda does not take it seriously and treats it as a joke. He then asks what happens if the elderly can swim. Mrs. Tabret points out that the family relatives would be well prepared with brickbats in hand. If the elderly dare to swim back to the shore, they would be cruelly killed immediately. (W. Maugham 234)

In addition to this so-called African custom, Maugham wrote about another Orientalist imagination. It again has to do with the discussion of life and death. After the sudden death of Maurice, his family wonders whether he had thought about committing suicide before. Mrs. Tabret recalls that she used to hire Indian ayahs to take care of the young Maurice and those foreign caretakers might have taught him some "strange ideas". Stella then frankly states that her husband had been deeply rooted in the Eastern notion of soul transmigration ("Indian soul rebirth" belief). It is believed that the soul would be reborn via another "container" after leaving the original wounded body. To Mrs. Tabret, this idea of reincarnation of life is contrary to Christian beliefs, and if one believes in that, she will give up the chance to rest in God's eternal peace. However, she admits that the concept of "soul rebirth" could make people feel more comfortable. (W. Maugham 269) Stella

later says that she would not deny this belief and even hopes that Maurice's spirit would enter her body as a fetus. (W. Maugham 290)

Maugham's strong obsession with Asian culture is highlighted in the play as he made wise and good use of the cultural other to argue for alternative views on life and death. Thus, he made a strong statement to positively support his avant-garde concept on mercy killing, and the foreign customs and beliefs appeared to be thought-provoking resources that facilitated building a sound and steady storyline of the play. To be specific, Mrs. Tabret ends her son's life because she believes he would be reincarnated and the Asian belief has given her an excuse to commit mercy killing. The exact purpose for Lei Haoran to remove those dialogues in *Xin Yan* is unknown and the most educated guess of such a modification was a consideration of British-Chinese cultural differences. On one hand, the brutal way the African tribes treat the elderly is not compatible with the Chinese idea of filial piety. On the other hand, the concept of reincarnation could be easily found in Buddhism and has long been taken for granted by Chinese society. Therefore, it might not be necessary to present this to a Chinese audience.

Introducing a New Ending and Calling for Alternative in Moral Standard

Lastly, the ending of *Xin Yan* is worth discussing. Maugham ended his story by allying all the characters with the mother, agreeing to cover her crime. The nurse even promises to claim that it is her fault to leave the sleeping pills by the patient's bedside. Mrs. Tabret is touched by her and gratefully admits that they both love Maurice deeply and he would always be in their hearts. (W. Maugham 319) In *Xin Yan*, Lei Haoran chose to end the play at the very moment when everyone is shocked by and screams after learning the truth. Apart from the murderer, other characters' views on the killing are unknown. This sudden ending reflects Lei Haoran's serious consideration of the expectation of the local audience. Moreover, as the Chinese Drama Group aimed at educating the general public for moral goodness through drama, it might be inappropriate for them to deliver messages contradicting with existing laws of modern society. Ma Jian compared Maugham's *The Sacred Flame* with Galsworthy's *A Family Man* in an article written before *Xin Yan* was performed. To him, similarities could be found in the two British plays as they share the same message that morality should "keep up with time (與時偕行)" and a sense of humanism (人道主義) is highlighted in the original texts. He had a positive view on the local acceptance of *The Sacred Flame* and believed that Maugham's awareness of the social and moral issues could go beyond time and place and this play still worth performing in Hong Kong in the 1950s.

Ma Lin (馬林) wrote a review of *Xin Yan* in *Sing Tao Daily* after watching the premiere performance on October 28, 1954 and his comments reflect the locals' evaluation of Maugham's *The Sacred Flame*. He believed that the play had rich messages on personal life and society. Although its theme followed the trend of depicting "love and death" in modern European literary works, it did not generally accept the deep-rooted moral and ethical standards of Western society. Maugham not only undervalued traditional heterosexual romantic love, but also redefined human love with a wider meaning from a new perspective. This is why it is important to bring his work to a Chinese audience because they should be educated with such revolutionary moral standards (道德革命) through drama. Chen Youhou (陳有后1915-2010), an active member of the Chinese Drama Group also wrote an article on the creative spirit in Maugham's works on October 21, 1954 in *Sing Tao Daily*. He believed that the so-called revolutionary moral standard should be associated with the struggle against woman chastity (婦女守節). According to Chinese traditions, it is normal for the wife to remain loyal to her dead husband. If the husband becomes disabled, the wife should stay with him for the rest of her life. The legitimacy of the disabled person's life should never be questioned, and his wife is therefore not allowed to pursue happiness outside marriage. Yet, Maugham's play provides Chinese women with an alternative by creating the character Stella as a role model. There is nothing wrong with a woman to follow her heart and she should "overcome this feudal barrier to find her new life (跳出這封建藩籬去找尋她新生的生活)". Though Chen Youhou's comment was a bit subdued and did not dare to mention the term "female sexuality" directly, he was able to read the play from a rather feminist perspective. By connecting Chinese traditions and the past situation of Chinese women with a new moral standard put forth by Maugham, the contemporary value of localizing this British play can be recognized.

Reflections from *Xin Yan* and the Next Step of the Chinese Drama Movement in Hong Kong

A. C. Scott (1909-1985), a British writer and deputy representative of the British Council in Hong Kong, was in the audience at the performance *Xin Yan*. He pointed out that the moral and ethical concepts shown in Maugham's play were incompatible with the Chinese traditions. It was a big challenge for the Chinese Drama Group to translate and modify the original text, yet they successfully transformed the story into a Chinese one and made people believed that it really happened at that time. He paid special attention to the crucial position of Hong Kong and stated that the new version should be dedicated to somewhere here, a city with "Chinese traditions

as the foundation and everywhere else is covered with fog”. Scott did not make his statement very clear, but he was probably referring to the East-West hybrid cultures in Hong Kong. Therefore, to perform such a localized British play as *Xin Yan* in the 1950s was to open up possibilities for Chinese drama. By modifying the story in a local setting, the Chinese Drama Group could modernize drama without going too Western. Scott also insisted that after the success of *Xin Yan*, the next step for the Chinese dramatists was to create plays of their own. They could not truly own the plays unless they learned to faithfully express the local colors.

It is worth mentioning that after the Chinese Drama Group performed *Xin Yan*, the drama critic Qiu Zhu (秋竹) compared it with *Lei Yu* (雷雨) written by the renowned Chinese dramatist Cao Yu (曹禺1910-1996) in 1933. He said Chinese audience was more familiar with the *Xin Yan*-style (《心燄》式的) drama *Lei Yu*. In this story, a pair of young lovers do not know they are half-siblings and accidentally engage in incestuous love. Thus, the complex relationship of their parents has led to their sufferings. By criticizing the authoritative father image and disclosing the ugliness in traditional families, *Lei Yu* could overthrow the deep-rooted feudalism that oppressed the Chinese new generation. Coincidentally, Ma Jian came together with the British professor F. S. Drake (林仰山1892-1974) of the School of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong to organize an English performance of *Lei Yu*, known as *Thunderstorm* in English. It was performed by university students at the auditorium of the University of Hong Kong on November 19 and 20, 1954. Yao Ke was invited as the director and scriptwriter, and the script he used was his own translation completed as early as in 1937, first published in *T'ien Hsia Monthly* (天下月刊) in Shanghai. Yao modified his translation to be easy for the actors to grasp and even shortened the play from four to five hours to one and a half. F. S. Drake introduced this performance as a pioneer to display Chinese modern drama in English. Through this drama, Westerners in Hong Kong could have a better understanding of the inner thoughts and feelings of their Chinese friends. (See Figure 5 to 8) Actually, *Thunderstorm* gave us a significant overview of the Hong Kong drama field in the 1950s on the other way around by introducing a Chinese story to the English-speaking community. While the Chinese Drama Group worked very hard to adapt foreign plays, at the same time, some dramatists were active in promoting China and Chinese culture through translating Chinese modern play into English. No matter what languages they used, drama was always a medium for them to carry their thoughts and ideas.



Figure 5. A stage photo of the performance *Thunderstorm* (1), *Wah Kiu Yat Bo*, November 19, 1954.

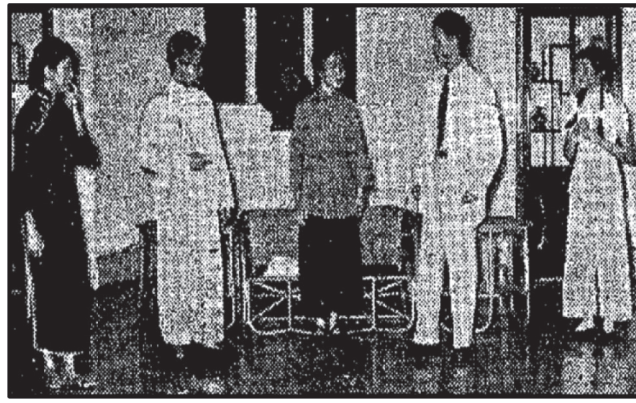


Figure 6. A stage photo of the performance *Thunderstorm* (2), *Wah Kiu Yat Bo*, November 19, 1954.



Figure 7. A stage photo of the performance *Thunderstorm* (3), *Wah Kiu Yat Bo*, November 19, 1954.

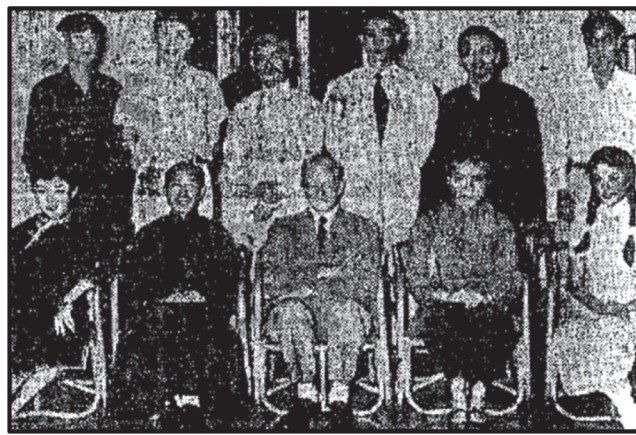


Figure 8. Photo of the performance team, *Wah Kiu Yat Bo*, November 18, 1954. (First row: Yao Ke sat at the second left and F.S.Drake sat in the middle)

Conclusion

In this paper, I have positioned Maugham's *The Sacred Flame* as a subtle gay text with queer qualities and traced how its unique gayness and queerness challenged traditional heterosexual marriage and family values. These revolutionary and satirical qualities were then modified in the Chinese modern drama *Xin Yan* and became beneficial resources for Chinese people to fight against the deep-rooted feudalism in their own culture. While Maugham's plays were banned in Mainland China after 1949, Chinese dramatists managed to have them performed in Hong Kong in the 1950s. Indeed, Hong Kong was a unique testing site for developing Chinese modern drama. Take the Chinese Drama Group as an example, the group members took advantage of the support of the Sino-British Club and promoted their performances as a way to foster cultural exchanges between the British and the

Chinese. In fact, they focused explicitly on fighting against old-fashioned moral and ethical values and what they really cared about was how to reform Chinese modern drama and educate the Chinese population.

The Taiwanese scholar Peng Hsiao-yen (彭小妍1952-) made use of the concept of transculturation created by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) to describe intercultural dynamics as a process of “two-way give and take (雙向的施與受)” in her book *Dandyism and Transcultural Modernity: the dandy, the flaneur, and the translator in 1930s Shanghai, Tokyo, and Paris*. To her, when texts travel, there is never a “one-way imposition of the dominant culture”, and translators, writers and artists always participate in a process of creative transformation. (Peng 25) In fact, the “two-way give and take” process that occurred during the long journey of *The Sacred Flame* and *Xin Yan* performed by the Chinese Drama Group in 1954 is still ongoing. After the stage performance, this play was then adapted into a Chinese novel and a film. Interestingly, the theme song of the film was later translated to English and set off a trend in the Western music world. Therefore, Maugham’s British original play went through a cross-language and cultural process and “traveled” from Britain to Mainland China and to Hong Kong. Finally, it returned to the Western world in a different medium. In short, my attempt in this paper is to rearticulate the missing link. Within the cross-cultural translation movement, the scriptwriters and dramatists of each stop could creatively reinterpret and modify the original sources vis-à-vis their own preferences and needs in different time and place, thus continuously adding new cultural meanings to the text. Their contributions deserved our attention and all adaptations could be singled out as unique and independent texts that demand further discussion and research.

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