

# Hsiung's Cultural Translation of the Peking Opera *Wang Baochuan*

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**Abstract** In modern history, the first English version of the Peking Opera *Wang Baochuan* was translated by Chinese playwright S.I. Hsiung in 1934. When it was performed on stage in London in the 1930s, it won huge success. Later on, the English version *Lady Precious Stream* was adapted into different languages and performed on stage in more than 40 countries around the world. This paper explores Hsiung's translation of the Peking Opera *Wang Baochuan* from a cultural perspective. The transcultural adaptation and rewriting of the Chinese story are examined with examples to analyze Hsiung's translation strategies from the textual and extra-textual levels. The study reveals that if a translated text intends to be smoothly accepted in a target culture, the translator should reproduce the text on the level of culture as a whole rather than of the word or sentence of the source text, and take into account the poetics in the receiving culture when the translation is made.

**Keywords** Shih - I Hsiung · *Lady Precious Stream* · Cultural translation strategy · Patronage

## Introduction

Shih-I Hsiung (熊式一) was one of the three most successful Chinese diaspora writers in the West in the 1930s. As a successful translator and bilingual writer, Hsiung enjoyed a great reputation in the world of English. He was best known for his play *Lady Precious Stream* (1936) and the novel *The Bridge of Heaven* (1943). His translation *Lady Precious Stream* based on a classical Peking opera *Wang Baochuan* was performed at the Little Theatre in London by the People's National Theatre and ran for about 1000 nights between 1934 and 1936, when Chinese culture was little known to the Western world. It was the first European production of a traditional

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Chinese play in four acts rendered by a Chinese playwright. The play was restaged several times in the 1940s and became “a staple of repertory and school productions.” Its significance lies in the fact that “it was the first to be written and directed by a Chinese immigrant and staged in London’s West End” (Thorpe 2014).

Hsiung was also the first playwright from China on Broadway. After the successful production of the play in London, Hsiung was invited to present *Lady Precious Stream* at the Booth Theatre in New York, and it ran for about 400 nights in the USA.

Later on, the English version of the play was used as a textbook in the UK to help students to understand Chinese culture, and it has been translated into different languages (Yeh 2014: 18). It was staged in many other parts of the world and even adapted for television in 1950.

Given that few English-speaking people knew China in the 1930s, Hsiung’s successful representation and production of the Peking opera *Wang Baochuan* in the world of English deserves our special attention. How could the translator make his translation *Lady Precious Stream* so successful in the UK and USA in the 1930s? What translation strategies did he use to deal with the culture-related problems of the play? What factors contributed to the success of his play production on stage? In this paper, I will attempt to answer the above questions by recontextualizing Hsiung’s translation of the Peking Opera *Wang Baochuan* into English and its production on stage at both the textual and extra-textual levels.

## **Hsiung the Translator and His Translation of *Lady Precious Stream***

In this section, I will first give a brief introduction of the translator Hsiung and his translation *Lady Precious Stream*, providing the historical contexts of his translation activities in the 1930s.

### ***Hsiung the Translator***

S.I. Hsiung (1902–1991), a native of Nanchang in Jiangxi province, graduated from the department of English of Beijing Higher Teacher’s College (Beijing Normal University) in 1923. After his graduation, he worked as a teacher of English and Chinese at several universities in Beijing, Shanghai and Jiangxi province. During the time he was teaching, he translated almost all the plays written by the Scottish playwright J.M. Barrie into Chinese as well as some plays written by George Bernard Shaw, and some were published in some influential magazines such as *Modern Novels* (《小说月报》). It was through translation that Hsiung became

familiar with modern English plays. These translation activities laid a solid foundation for his later translation of Chinese texts into English.

In 1932, due to his failure to be promoted as a professor as he lacked a doctorate degree from a foreign university, Hsiung went to University of London to conduct his Ph.D. research in theatre study. During a talk with his supervisor Prof. Allardyce Nicoll, Hsiung was advised to translate a Peking Opera into English with a view to making some money to support himself in London. He followed the advice and began to select a play which might cater to British theater-goers. After a careful comparative study of some traditional Chinese plays, he finally chose the Peking Opera *Wang Baochuan* and translated it into English. The English version entitled *Lady Precious Stream* was published in 1936 by Methuen & Co. Ltd., a London-based publisher, and was put on the stage in the same year. The production of the play, directed by Nancy Price and Hsiung himself, took place at the Little Theatre in London and was presented by the People's National Theatre. It was the first traditional Peking Opera to be translated into English by a Chinese playwright and performed by Western players in the west.

The performance was a huge success and won Hsiung great acclaim. Congratulations rained in on him from all quarters and the reviews of the book and the performance teemed with praise by such influential newspapers and magazines such as *The Times* and *The Spectator*.

The commercial and critical success of his translation encouraged Hsiung to translate another classic Chinese play *Xixiangji* into English. The translation entitled *The Romance of the Western Chamber*, however, was not well received, though it was recognized as a piece of great work and republished by Columbia University Press in the 1960s. Hsiung later devoted himself to the translation and writing of plays and novels in English, with a view to introducing Chinese culture to the Western world, and helping Westerners have a better understanding of the Chinese people. Among his works, his novel *The Bridge of Heaven* was so popular that it was reprinted four times in 1943, four times in 1944 and twice in 1945. In his later years, while working as a teacher in different universities around the world, he translated most of his own works into Chinese, including *Lady Precious Stream* and *The Bridge of Heaven*.

### ***The Success of Lady Precious Stream on the London Stage***

It took Hsiung only six weeks to complete his translation of *Lady Precious Stream* since he accepted Prof. Nicoll's advice in 1932. After it was published in 1934 by Methuen, a London-based publisher, the English version was reprinted three times successively in three years for its success on stage. The play ran for nearly 1000 performances in London for fourteen months. It had more than 400 performances in

the USA, with three seasons separately performed in New York, Chicago, the mid-west and east, and the west coast. What's more, "the play has been translated into nearly all the languages and produced in nearly all the capitals of the world" (Hsiung 1939: 176). It is said that in Holland, the title of the play was changed to *The Embroidered Ball*, with the heroine's name being Lady Pearl Stream. In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the heroine's name was transferred to Lady Spring Water and Lady Diamond Stream separately. Newspapers and magazines reported the success of the performance and literary critics praised the play. The play was compared to "almond blossoms", "the feathers on a butterfly's wing", "last nights' sunset", "the dew on the grass" and "hoar-frost in the sun" (Hsiung 1939: 165). The newspaper *Apollo* even described the play as "a gem of the first water in a charming setting". *The National Review* complimented the author for "having done what Fitzgerald had done to enrich English literature." The *Sunday Times* considered the author to be "an enchanter of a rare type", and G.K. Chesterton's *Weekly* regarded the play "a little masterpiece", and the *Spectator* said "It has the marks of a fine culture" (Hsiung 1939: 165).

We can safely conclude that Hsiung's translation *Lady Precious Stream* was a huge success when it was performed in the West in the 1930s. As a matter of fact, it is owing to the great popularity of the performance of Hsiung's play in London from 1934 to 1936 that 1935 was termed "China Year" by the then Chinese Ambassador Quo Tai-chi (Lin 1935: 106).

## **Hsiung's Cultural Translation Strategy of the Traditional Chinese Play**

During his stay in London, Hsiung once observed that "the most unfortunate fact about China was that the West got to know China and her people at a very undesirable time" (Hsiung 1939: 187). In the 1930s, few Westerners were familiar with the Chinese culture, and the Chinese people was termed as "Chinaman", who could perform all kinds of inhuman black magic like Fu Manchu in books and films made by Western writers and film producers. There existed great cultural gaps between China and the Western world when Hsiung undertook his translation project to translate a traditional Chinese play into English and stage it in London. One may wonder what elements had contributed to the success of his translation and production of the play in a society where people knew little about Chinese traditional theatre?

The paper attempts to explore Hsiung's translation of the Peking Opera *Wang Baochuan* from a cultural perspective. Transcultural adaptation and rewriting of the Chinese story are examined to analyze Hsiung's translation strategies at the textual and extra-textual levels.

### ***Textual Level: Cultural Rewriting of the Original Text***

This section discusses the cultural rewriting of the original made by Hsiung in the process of his translation of *Lady Precious Stream* at the textual level. It includes three parts: (1) adapting the Chinese play from Peking Opera to English drama; (2) rewriting the content; and (3) recreating the comic effects.

#### **Adaption of the Chinese Play: From Peking Opera to English Drama**

There are two kinds of translation attitudes that a translator has when he/she is facing a source text. When the text enjoys a high status in the source culture, the translator usually strictly follows the principle of faithfulness. On the contrary, when the text is considered low status in the source culture, the translator often takes liberties with the original, rewriting it according to his purpose of translation. The latter situation aptly applies to Hsiung's attitude towards his translation of the Peking Opera *Wang Baochuan*. Hsiung expressed his views more than once that the traditional Chinese play was merely a popular commercial melodrama: "...from the very beginning I have never tried to disguise the fact that *Lady Precious Stream* is a commonplace melodrama" (1939: 177). And fifty years later, he still insisted

I didn't translate it (*Lady Precious Stream*) faithfully from the original text, which is only a commercial play in Chinese. Despite my statement in the introduction that the English version was translated from a traditional Chinese play, I only borrowed the general framework of the original story. In fact, I used all kinds of rewriting techniques such as addition, omission, alteration, etc. in the process of my translation (Hsiung 2010: 30).

Since Hsiung did not regard the source text as a typically representative traditional Chinese play, he enjoyed freedom to recreate his own version, though it was based on several versions of the Chinese story. In his autobiography he even used the title of "Writing *Wang Baochuan*" (*Lady Precious Stream*) referring to his translation activity in the 1930s in London.

Regarding Hsiung's adaption of the Chinese play into English, obvious changes can be observed. First, the Chinese play lasts five or six hours in performance, whereas Hsiung's version is much shortened to be in accordance with the time requirement of the English play's performance. Second, the plot of the story has been changed to some extent. In the original play, the general Hsieh Ping-kuei had two ladies as his wives. In the translation, the general fled before his marriage to the princess and reunited with his wife Lady Precious Stream, while the princess was left to the foreign minister who was absent from the original story. What's more, Hsiung adapted the Chinese play into a spoken drama in four acts. It was necessary for the translator to do so if he wanted to make his translation a success on the London stage. When commenting on the differences between the Chinese and English plays, the English scholar Gordon Bottomley pointed out that there are many beautiful literary passages in classic Chinese plays, which are difficult to perform on a Western stage. The Western players believed that performance of

Chinese plays would be impossible without a great amount of deletion of these passages (1935). A French dramatist shared this view. He stated that a great amount of rewriting is needed if a Chinese play is to be put on the French stage. Since the Chinese plays have many songs but few scenes, it is of a great necessity for the translator to revise the dialogue of the Chinese play by reducing the songs and making the play coherent (Du 2002: 152). As Hsiung was familiar with English plays by reading and translating them or going to theatre in person, his translation of the Peking opera *Wang Baochuan* is in essence a kind of adaptation. Moreover, Hsiung's adaption from Peking opera to Western drama was cleverly done. As Lin Yutang said favorably,

.....the original exits in separate operatic scenes (for I wish to emphasize the point that the Chinese drama is essentially operatic), these different scenes being seldom acted on the one hand on the same night, but are chosen according to the spirit of the occasion, and very often according to the whims and moods of the host, when the performance is privately given at a gentleman's home. This being so, it is easy to understand why there is less demand for dramatic unity and a logical evolution of the plot, with climax and denouement in the western sense...As it is presented on the English stage, certain adaptations to ensure continuity are inevitable.

It can be seen that by adapting the Chinese play into an English drama, Hsiung makes it performable on the English stage. It also ensures the coherence and cohesion of the play within a limited and acceptable time which English audiences get used to.

### **Rewriting of the Content**

Andre Lefevere in his work *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* argues that translation is a form of rewriting. In other words, when transferring a text from one language into another, a literary translator could use all kinds of manipulative techniques, which include omission, addition, paraphrase, alteration, etc. He further states that all the forms of rewriting are determined by two factors: the translator's ideology and the poetics dominant in the receiving literature at the time the translation is made (2004: 41–58). Examining the English version *Lady Precious Stream*, we can safely say that it is a rewriting of the Chinese play rather than a proper translation because of the translator's ideology imposed on him by the source culture and the poetics dominant in the receiving literature. However, this type of rewriting is justified because it takes into account different traditions of stage performances between China and the West. In the following we will examine two rewriting techniques Hsiung has employed in his English version: addition and omission.

### Addition of Content

For the convenience of the understanding of English audiences who knew little about Chinese culture, lengthy and informative descriptions of situation and characters, which are absent from the Chinese plays, are added before each scene and before the entrance of each character. And they are delivered by an “Honourable Reader” on the stage. For example, an extra introductory scene of more than 400 words is added at the beginning of the story, which introduces the arrangements of the traditional Chinese theatre and the descriptions of the character of the Prime Minister. On the one hand, these introductions help Westerners better understand the traditional Chinese story; on the other hand, they could arouse readers’/ audiences’ interests in the Oriental flavor of the stage. As Lascelles Abercrombie, a professor from Bedford College, stated in his introduction to the English version of the play, the technique of Hsiung’s imaginary theatre is a delight for English readers when they read that the Prime Minister wears a long black beard “indicating that he is not the villain of the piece” (1934: viii).

Another addition is the scene of the family party in the garden at the beginning of the story. The original play is a love story between the Prime Minister’s third daughter Lady Precious Stream and the beggar Hsieh Ping-kuei. Although there are different versions of the story in Chinese, they all start with Lady Precious Stream throwing the embroidered ball. It was the will of God that the ball was received by the beggar Hsieh Ping-kuei so that Lady Precious Stream had no choice but to marry him. In order to make the story more reasonable and acceptable to English readers, the translator decided “to take the matter away from God and to put it, first, tantalizingly into the hands of the Prime Minister, her father, and finally into those of the lady herself” (1939: 173). As a result, the family party of the Prime Minister with his three daughters and two son-in-laws is held in Act I to celebrate the Chinese New Year, enjoying the snow. It is here that the gardener Hsieh Ping-kuei, who, however, is a beggar in the street in the original story, has the opportunity to show his talents both in physical strength and poetry writing. Thus, it is reasonable for Lady Precious Stream to fall in love with him, and later instruct him secretly to receive her embroidered ball when she is selecting her future husband.

In addition, an extra character of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is absent in the Chinese story, is brought into the English version. Hsiung explained the reason for the introduction of this character as follows:

In ancient China, men were polygamous, so the King of the Western Regions could have Lady Precious Stream as his Queen-proper and the Princess as his Vice-Queen. Since the revolution in 1911, the law of my country forbids a man to have more than one wife, and my solution to the difficulty is the introduction of this man of the world whose sole duty is to help me to get an extra lady off my hands (1939: 173–174).

Despite the translator’s careful handling of this matter in his English version, Hsiung was accused of introducing to foreign readers/audiences a play which contained a deplorable and obsolete custom (Hsiung 1939: 174). The above

example reveals clearly the great pressure the ideology of the source culture had imposed on the translator even though he was far away from his motherland.

There are also quite a few interesting additions in the English play. Some characters' words were inserted by the translator in order to express his view that women's status should be high both at home and in society. Here are some examples:

- (1) "I am sure you will make a very good, henpecked husband".
- (2) "You must kneel down to her, to show that you hold the female sex in higher esteem".
- (3) "All the best families of this and every other kingdom are ruled by the wife".

It is evident that when handling the relationship between men and women, and husband and wife in the play, the translator takes into consideration the women's liberation movement around the world after the First World War, which advocated equality between men and women. Additions of this kind into the English play reveal that the translator took into account the social issues which people were concerned with, and could arouse their interest in the play.

### Omission of Content

It seems true that where there are additions in the translation there are omissions from the original. Omissions can be easily spotted in *Lady Precious Stream*. The translator intended to delete those parts which he thought were superstitious and advocate the old moral lessons of ancient China. Hsiung stated in the preface of his Chinese version *Lady Precious Stream* what should be omitted from his translation: "my opinion is that such Chinese customs as superstition, polygamy and the death penalty should not be introduced to foreign readers/audiences. As a result, I greatly changed the plot of the original text in my translation" (2006: 192). In what follows, let us look at some omissions in Hsiung's translation.

All the Chinese versions of the play start with some descriptions of the supernatural phenomena, which predict that when Lady Precious Stream threw the embroidered ball to select her would-be husband, it was the will of God that it was received by the beggar Hsieh Ping-kuei in the street. Since the translator regarded these descriptions of supernatural phenomena as superstition, he deleted them from his English version. Instead, he added the scene of a family get-together enjoying the snow and introducing the gardener Hsieh Ping-kuei to the party.

Another example also well illustrates Hsiung's principle of omission. When the general Hsieh Ping-kuei returned to China, and the princess of the western regions followed him and arrived at the border, the old Chinese general Mu in the tower of the Pass addressed her impudently as follows:



**The original text:**

莫老将军: 丫头吓, 丫头! 我国先行平贵, 精精壮壮, 被你们掠了去, 不教他好事, 尽教他吃鸦片烟, 弄的面孔饥瘦。我这里有钩镰枪, 把你钩上来, 把你浑身衣服剥掉, 看看你是男是女。

**Hsiung's version:**

Mu (pointing to her). You bewitching little minx! Captain Hsieh Ping-Kuei of our country used to be a robust young giant, and now, after eighteen years' adventure in your country he comes back **the wreck of a man!** How can I allow him to see you again, you little minx!

In comparison with the Chinese text, it can be seen that two key facts uttered by general Mu are omitted from Hsiung's version because 吃鸦片烟 (smoke opium) is regarded as evil, and 把你浑身衣服剥掉 (take off your clothes with my big iron hook to see whether you are a woman or not) is offensive to a lady.

In the summary of Section "[Rewriting of the Content](#)", by using the strategies of rewriting the content of the Chinese play, Hsiung makes it acceptable to the target readers/audiences. It is true that the play is a traditional Chinese story but at the same time it is "modern" in the sense that Chinese superstitions and the outdated customs of ancient China are not represented in the story; while new ideas such as equality between men and women are advocated in accordance with the modern spirit of society.

**Recreating the Comic Effects**

*Wang Baochuan* is a traditional Chinese comedy, full of witty dialogue and humorous elements. However, because of differences between the Chinese and English languages, it is not an easy task for the translator to retain the comic effects of the original play while making a faithful translation. As an experienced translator and theatergoer, Hsiung knew the importance and power of the comic effects in the play. While trying his best to represent the humorous elements of the original, he did not translate them literally when it was impossible for him to do so. He sometimes even "recreates" the humorous effects by using wordplay in English. Take the following excerpt for example:

**The original text:**

(代战公主: .....到了他国地面, 说话要和气点。)

马达、江海: 是。老头请呢。

莫将: 老头不玩火球。

马达、江海: 老将!

莫将: 老姜到菜市买去。

马达、江海: 皇上!

莫将: 黄鳝上鱼店里买去。

马达、江海: 主子!

莫将: 肘子要到肉店里买去。你们两个人, 长得人不人, 鬼不鬼, 也配长了两条仙鹤腿! 快回去, 换一个好看一点儿的来说话罢!

**The faithful translation:**

Ma & Kiang: Hey, old man on the rampart!

Mu: The old man does not play a fireball.

Ma & Kiang: My **old General!**

Mu: **Old ginger?** But it at the shop for selling salt and oils.

Ma & Kiang: My **Emperor!**

Mu: You want **yellow eel?** (here the Chinese pun is lost in the translation). Go and buy it at the fish market.

Ma & Kiang: My **Lord!**

Mu: You want **pig's tripe?** Go and buy it at the butcher's. Look here, you two fellows! You look neither like human beings nor like devils, with you pairs of shaky legs looking like those of stork. Go and get someone more presentable to talk with me.

**Hsiung's version**

Ma (calling aloud). Hey, my **old man!**

Mu. Old moon? We can't see the **old moon** until midnight.

Kiang. My **old General!**

Mu. **Old ginger?** Buy it at the market where vegetables are for sale.

Ma. **My king!**

Mu. There is **no kinsman** of yours in China.

Kiang. **My master!**

Mu. **Mustard?** Go to the grocery for it!

Ma. **My Lord!**

Mu. **He is in heaven.**

Kiang. **My Emperor.**

Mu. **You are empty?** This is not an eating house! What are you two doing here? You are too ugly to be called human beings and certainly too ordinary to be called devils; and the most peculiar thing about you is how did you get a pair of legs like those of a stork? Go back and get some one more presentable to talk with me!

The dialogue above is between the two officers of the western regions and the old general in the tower on the pass. When responding to their greetings the old man pretended to be deaf in order to make his answers witty and humorous. The translator did not translate all these humorous elements literally, which would be an impossible task, due to differences of wordplay in two languages. Rather, except those phrases such as "old general" versus "old ginger", he created English humor by using terms in the target language such as pairs of "old man" versus "old moon", "king" versus "kinsman", "master" versus "mustard", and "emperor" versus "empty". By recreating the comic effects of the original play, the translator vividly represents the wit and humor of the dialogue.

Moreover, Hsiung's "recreation" of the humor goes a little bit further. Since it is difficult for a translator to translate humor from one language into another, Hsiung

sometimes is found to “create” humor which however was not present in the original as compensation. Here is a case in point.

WEI. ...I remember some poet said: ‘To write good poems, one needs perspiration!’ It is very cold now, you see, you see. We can’t expect any perspiration until the summer comes.

WANG. Perspiration? You mean inspiration!

WEI. Oh, yes! Inspiration! (He wipes his forehead with his sleeve.) Not perspiration! Of course not perspiration!

SILVER S. I know you don’t mean perspiration.

PRECIOUS S. If it is only perspiration that you need, then you must be the greatest poet of the age!

The dialogue above is between Lady Precious Stream and her brother-in-law General Wei, who has no literary talents but is always eager to show off. When he quoted an ancient saying, he mistook “inspiration” for “perspiration” in the saying, making himself a laughing stock in front of the family. This funny incident, however, does not occur in the original play. It is Hsiung’s own creation. In fact, there are many funny scenes like the quoted one above in the English version. It is no wonder that Lin Yu Tang makes the following comments:

Mr. Hsiung is no servile translator, but is partly a creator himself, with the first, fine frenzy of light-hearted youth, which does not know what literal accuracy means.....The wit and humor are all there in the Chinese original, being essentially creations of the Chinese people, but Mr. Hsiung has taken this material and handled it masterfully and courageously. As a rough estimate, I would describe the play as fifteen percent Mr. Hsiung, and eighty-five percent literal translation (Lin 1935: 107).

### ***Extra-Textual Level: Promotion Strategy and Patronage***

It would be very naïve for us to believe that the successful story of *Lady Precious Stream* in London in the 1930s is only due to Hsiung’s masterful translation skills in the traditional Chinese play. We should bear in mind that at that time the translator Hsiung was only a foreign student from a remote country known as China. Actually two factors in connection to the translation and production of *Lady Precious Stream* played an important role in his success, i.e. his promotion strategy of the translated play and the patronage he obtained.

#### **Promotion Strategy by Means of Para-Texts**

As mentioned in Section “[Adaption of the Chinese Play: From Peking Opera to English Drama](#)”, Hsiung did not faithfully translate the Chinese play. His translation *Lady Precious Stream* is actually a kind of adaption or a form of rewriting both

in terms of content and style. However, in the introduction to the English version of the play, the translator ensures his readers/audiences that the play is “authentic” Chinese. He emphasized that “In the play *I have not attempted in the least to alter anything*. The following pages present *a typical play exactly as produced on a Chinese stage. It is every inch a Chinese play except the language*, which, as far as my very limited English allows, I have interpreted as satisfactorily as I can” (1934: xvii).

The italicized phrases and sentences in the quotation repeatedly stress that the English version is authentic Chinese with no alteration. As an important part of the text written by the translator, the introduction definitely misleads/misguides readers/audiences’ expectations of the play. It is evident that Hsiung wrote it in this way for the sake of promotion: selling a traditional Chinese play to English readers/audiences who are unfamiliar with it.

Further evidence of Hsiung’s promotion strategy for his translation is the subtitle of the book. It is “An Old Chinese Play translated into English according to its traditional style”.

Moreover, in his other translation *The Romance of the Western Chamber*, which was published a year later, in 1935, an advertisement for *Lady Precious Stream* was printed with an emphasis on its faithfulness to the Chinese play. It goes as follows,

*Lady Precious Stream* is a play of some antiquity in the Chinese tradition...Now for the first time it has been translated into English by a Chinese who not only has perfect command of the English language but is himself of the Chinese stage. No attempt has been made to alter anything, so that the play remains definitely Chinese in character, yet despite the considerable differences in the style, there is a curious resemblance between the themes and those to be found in Western drama. There is a preface by Professor Lascelles Abercrombie, and 12 illustrations in monotone.

More importantly, it is the translator who takes the initiative of promotion. Usually, it is supposed that a publisher would do sales promotion for a translated book. But for Hsiung, things are quite different. As he himself stated, when he took the advice of his professor to translate a Chinese play into English, he thought about the possibility of making some profits from this translation project to see whether he could make a living from translation. Therefore, his choice of a common commercial Chinese play, his unfaithful attitude toward the original text, and his adaption and rewriting of the play in both content and style clearly show that the translator has a strong purpose for his translation: that is to sell it to English readers/audiences. He admitted honestly that his translation was commercially driven: “I wrote *Lady Precious Stream* for a solely commercial reason and if it achieved something else, however desirable, that would be purely luck and I must consider myself, as an author, to have completely failed” (Hsiung 1939: 168). Hence, it is understandable that the translator (or rewriter) would spare no efforts to promote his translation, adopting all strategies available to him to win the market.

### Patronage: Godfathers and Godmothers of the Play

Patronage from the target culture could play a decisive role in the reception of a translation. Hsiung himself mentioned in the postscript of his play *The Professor from Beijing* (1939) that *Lady Precious Stream* has two godfathers and two godmothers. **Lascelles Abercrombie**, a Professor from Bedford College, who Hsiung called 'the godfather of *Lady Precious Stream*' (1939: 166). Hsiung stated that "the sincere tribute paid by such a famous man of letters to an unknown author means much more than a mere touch of godfatherly kindness". As an influential theater expert and critic, Abercrombie wrote a preface to *Lady Precious Stream*, in which he spoke highly of the play. He said Hsiung was an enchanter, who could cast a spell on "our occidental minds". The translation could be "read as easily as a romance", and it "can be nothing but a piece of literature written (and wonderfully well written) in English". "The ever-present humor of the play" and its imaginary theatre, which "kept artistic convention of the Chinese play" could bring readers pleasures and let them know the special flavors of the Chinese stage. What's more fascinating, when readers read the play, they would experience the life of the Chinese people. He commented enthusiastically:

The real force of Mr. Hsiung's Chinese magic does not lie in the delightful technique of his imaginary theatre: it is in the lives — the minds, the manners, the speech — of the people he shows us there, enchanted people, who confer their enchantment on us. The moment when the spell is clinched comes, I think, when the Prime Minister Wang says: 'Today is New Year's Day. I want to celebrate it in some way. It looks as if it is going to snow. I propose that we have a feast here in the garden to enjoy the snow.' To enjoy the snow! *There* is the essence of the spell Mr. Hsiung casts on our occidental minds; these charming people of his have a secret, which we have not: it is the secret of how to live (1935: VII-IX).

An anecdote can well illustrate the strong influence of the preface on the literary field. It was said that Hsiung came across a celebrity when *Lady Precious Stream* was gaining popularity. The man said to Hsiung that "he had received a copy and that he thought it was very nicely got up and that the preface by Professor Abercrombie was charming,... [but] he had no time to go further, and furthermore, he wouldn't for the world like to be disillusioned by going further" (1939: 166-167).

According to Hsiung, the godmother of the play was Mrs. Donson-Scott. She read the manuscript of the translation, and believed it could make an instant success. When she was told that Professor Abercrombie admired the play after his reading, she advised Hsiung to ask the professor to do something on the part of the translator. As a result, the complimentary and influential preface was written by the influential literary figure in the target society for the promotion of Hsiung's translation.

Besides patronage for the play in book form, the successful performance of the play on stage should be attributed to another godfather and godmother, Jonathan Field and Nancy Price. It was Jonathan Field, the actor and writer, who recommended Hsiung's play to Nancy Price, the producer of the Little Theater in London.

It was Miss Price with the help of Hsiung who labored on the production of the play for five weeks, including investing money and borrowing costumes. Later on, Hsiung said with gratitude that without their kind help the play wouldn't be performed on the London stage at all (Hsiung 1939: 167–168).

## Conclusion

The successful story of Hsiung's *Lady Precious Stream* in the West in the 1930s is a miracle to some extent if we take into consideration the differences between the plays in the West and China and the target readers/audiences' unfamiliarity with the Chinese culture. Though it is true that Hsiung's translation and production of the play catered to the curiosity of an audience who knew almost nothing about China, this study shows convincingly that the following factors contributed to his success: (1) the adaption of the traditional Chinese play into an English drama; (2) the skillful rewriting of the original text; and (3) the use of promotion strategy and patronage which help to attract readers' interests in the translation. Hsiung's cultural translation strategies of the traditional Chinese play also reveal that if a translated text intends to be smoothly accepted in a target culture, the translator should reproduce the text on the level of culture as a whole rather than of the word or sentence of the source text, while at the same time take into account the poetics in the receiving culture when the translation is made. Hsiung's pioneering efforts in introducing Chinese theatrical art to the world and in shaping an objective and favorable perception of the Chinese people deserve our special attention when the Chinese government is taking Chinese culture globally in the new era.

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