



How Taiwanese Scripted Drama is Making Waves



This report is commissioned by [TAICCA](#) and written by [K7 Media](#)

August 2022



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Introduction

One of the disadvantages of a trend-driven industry like television is that it's easy to overlook positive changes that happen gradually and without much fanfare. A perfect example of this is the steady rise of Taiwan as a force to be reckoned with in scripted drama.

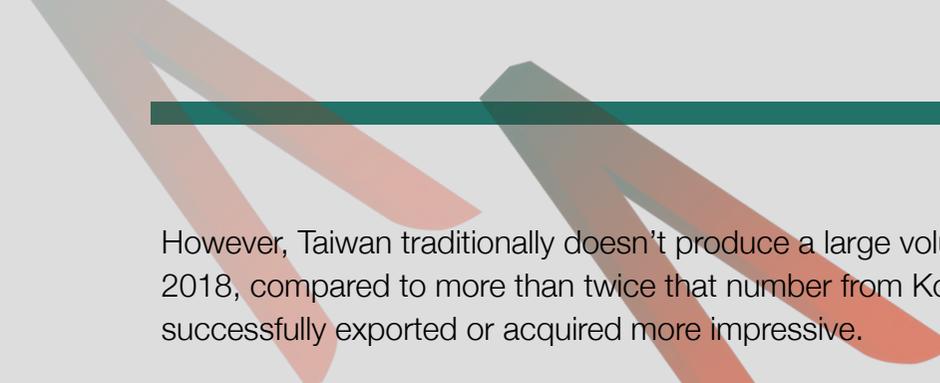
While it has been South Korea that has attracted most of the attention, with Japan and China close behind, Taiwan has been enjoying something of a **quiet revolution in scripted programming** over the last five years.

As of June 2022, Taiwan ranks highly amongst the most travelled Asian drama formats. ***You Are My Destiny*** (also known as *Fated To Love You*) first aired in 2013, but has now sold to 11 countries, making it the second most popular Asian drama export currently on the market. Only Japanese show ***Mother*** has made more format sales, with international Korean hit ***Good Doctor*** in third place.

With Mandarin Chinese as its primary language, and close cultural ties with Korea and Japan, Taiwan is proving to be an increasingly useful nexus point for Asian formats, buying in more than 50% of its programming as finished tape, largely from Korea, but also maintaining considerable investment in homegrown productions that continue to rate well against imports.

This success is also due in large part to the support of the **Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA)**, a state funded body whose aim is to elevate Taiwanese production and cultural exports. Taiwan's technological base is also playing a part. The country has one of the highest internet speeds in the world, and the second largest number of streaming platforms in Asia, with **16 domestic platforms and seven global streamers** such as Netflix. TAICCA is also investing heavily in new forms of crossover creative technologies like VR, AR and holograms.

Also worthy of note is Taiwan's progressive attitude towards **LGBTQ+** content. It even has a streaming platform, GagaOOLala, dedicated to gay and lesbian programming, including popular romantic BL drama ***Papa & Daddy***. Compared to the more conservative attitudes of its neighbouring countries, this puts Taiwan in a particularly strong position as similarly themed programming becomes more and more important in the west.



However, Taiwan traditionally doesn't produce a large volume of scripted programming compared to its neighbours – only 50 such shows in 2018, compared to more than twice that number from Korea - but that only makes the percentage of Taiwanese dramas that are successfully exported or acquired more impressive.

Netflix has been quick to swoop on Taiwanese content in order to quickly expand its appeal across Mandarin Chinese-speaking territories. Crime thriller ***Nowhere Man***, detective drama ***The Victim's Game***, family drama ***Little Big Women*** and supernatural period piece ***The Ghost Bride*** have all been notable pick-ups for the global streamer. HBO has also invested in Taiwanese drama, using its HBO Asia subsidiary to join broadcaster PTS and local SVOD Catchplay in co-producing ***The World Between Us***, a multi-faceted issues-based legal thriller that broke ratings records when aired domestically.

Like many Asian territories, the most popular form of scripted entertainment is so-called “**idol dramas**” – romantic shows, often set in modern day urban settings, built around popular young stars, or “idols”, whom fans will follow from one production to the next. The best known examples of the genre in the West come from Japan and Korea, but it is notable that those countries also buy lots of Taiwanese idol dramas for their domestic audiences.

All of which clearly positions Taiwan's production base strongly for **continued growth and evolution** in the coming years, especially as a new generation of creative talent is coming to the fore, with sensibilities more attuned to global tastes.

In this report, we'll take an in-depth look at **three successful Taiwanese dramas**, from the late 2000s to the present, as well as **sharing insights** from the people who made and sold the shows in question.

You Are My Destiny (命中注定我愛你)

24x90'

Production: SETTV Co. Ltd.

Distribution: SETTV Co. Ltd.

First Tx: March 2008

Debuting on TTV in March 2008, almost fifteen years later this series remains one of the highest rated romantic dramas in Taiwan's history and is still producing international versions. Adaptations launched in Japan and China as recently as 2020 and it is the second highest selling Asian drama format with 11 lifetime sales so far, including Turkey, Ukraine and South Korea. The finished tape has also sold to 15 countries, and was the second highest rated drama on Chinese satellite TV when it aired on Hunan TV China in 2011.

The series, from acclaimed producer Chen Yu-Shan and director Chen Ming-Chang, is a modern day fairy tale. It follows a young woman from a humble background who has a one-night-stand with the heir to a wealthy family and becomes pregnant, forcing them to marry. However, when the heir's former girlfriend returns, the heroine is forced to have an abortion and they split up. Reunited later in life, she is now a more confident young woman and they rekindle their relationship on a more even footing.

With bold melodramatic plot twists and likeable humorous characters, ***You Are My Destiny*** was an early indicator that the tone and style of Asian romance stories could have breakthrough appeal outside the continent.

INTERVIEW: International Business Department of SETTV CO., LTD

K7: Can you give us some background context for your company?

SETTV: Since its establishment in 1992, SETTV has adhered to the spirit of originality, with self-made content as the core operation. We have five major content strands - drama, entertainment, music, finance and news - and operate six TV channels (Sanlih Taiwan, Sanlih Metropolis, Sanlih News, Sanlih Finance, Sanlih International, MTV).

Each year, SETTV produces 4000 hours of programming, the largest content creation base in Taiwan. Adhering to the concept of "one source for multiple uses", we operate across a few major aspects, including new media, publishing, and cultural and creative exhibitions, forming the Sanlih Media Group.

K7: What can you tell us about the development process that led to *You Are My Destiny*? What was the appeal in 2008?

*SETTV: **You Are My Destiny** sounds like a century-old cliché love story— an unexpected pregnancy happens to an ordinary girl who then falls in love with the rich and handsome prince. However, whether through the story or the dialogue, it strives to be lifelike, so that the viewers have a sense of empathy.*

During the script creation process, the drama supervisory team and the screenwriter discussed the content of the script, modified, and then re-discussed and so on. Designing the relationship made the plot develop beyond the audience's expectations, but in a way that was reasonable and recognised and accepted by everyone. Every scene and episode intertwines with each other, which naturally develops the interests of the audience watching these shows.

This also encourages the audience to keep discussing the drama. The characters are lovable, the dialogue is easy to understand and deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Elements that have not been touched in past idol dramas, such as premarital sex, premarital pregnancy and abortion make the drama diverse and realistic. In addition to the usual family dramas and basic elements of the workplace, the attempt to expand more diversified themes is sure to ring true.

It successfully expanded the audience and reversed the unrealistic character settings in idol dramas that are often complained about by audiences. Even if the audience is watching in front of the TV, they feel they can relate to the protagonists.



© SETTV



Cambodian adaptation © **Hang Meas Production**



Japanese adaptation © **FUJI TV**

K7: How much freedom is there for production companies adapting the format?

SETTV: Each overseas adaptation adds some degree of local content and elements from their production team to make the remake suitable for local audiences. All versions keep the core value of the original stories, as well as their own unique creativity and characteristics. Considering each country's culture, customs, and other reasons, under the principle of not deviating from the main story structure, we give each authorised region a lot of room for adaptation. Our original screenwriters are not involved.

K7: What approaches were made to you regarding adaptations? Did overseas producers discover the show via the trade markets, or did they come to you directly? And do you think a US version would work?

SETTV: The first broadcast of You Are My Destiny in Taiwan in 2008 received high ratings, an average of more than 10%, and it continued to consistently rank No. 1 in the drama ratings. In the same year, it won the best drama programme and the best programme marketing award at the 43rd Taiwan TV Golden Bell Awards.

We received a great response from other Asian networks. Soon, many filmmakers and TV stations in Asia inquired about remake opportunities. Asian dramas are geographically and culturally related after all, so it is understandable that the countries where the first remakes were made were mostly Asian.

In the past few years, the practices of remaking American drama scripts into Asian or Taiwanese dramas, or remaking Asian drama scripts into American dramas, are more commonly seen and well-practiced. As long as the original script is high in originality and has universal values, with some twists on local cultural elements and modern business models, a successful remake should be expected.

K7: What's your take on Taiwan's audio-visual industries in 2022? Have you seen major changes since the global streamers entered the market?

SETTV: The direct change of multinational streaming platforms entering Taiwan is that viewers have more choice. Also, multinational streaming platforms become an additional potential partner for commercial TV stations and production companies in Taiwan. After all, the ultimate goal of a show is to be able to sell. With streaming platforms joining the market, there are positive phenomena in both copyright sales and competition between TV stations and platforms.

K7: Do you do deals differently now? You launched your own OTT platform, but has SET also been doing deals with the likes of Netflix?

SETTV: For cooperation with streaming platforms, SETTV adopts the most open and positive attitude. There is stable cooperation with international streaming platforms in licensing of SET's self-produced dramas. Not only the latest dramas, but also the classic idol dramas produced by SET in previous years that can be watched on international streaming platforms.

K7: What's your best performing drama genre, what are your upcoming launches and what other scripted formats have you sold for adaptation?

SETTV: Idol drama is our best performing genre. In the second half of this year, we are preparing a new Mandarin drama for the primetime 8pm slot. Other popular scripted formats in our portfolio include **The Prince Who Turns Into A Frog**, **Autumn's Concerto**, **My Queen**, **The Fierce Wife**, **My Lucky Star**, **Two Fathers**, and **Bromance**. Most of these shows have at least three format sales.



© SETTV



In Time With You (我可能不會愛你)

13x90'

Production: GTV and San Feng Limited Companies

Distribution: GTV

First Tx: September 2011

From acclaimed Taiwanese writer Mag Hsu (*Time Story*, *An Innocent Mistake*) and Chu Yu-Ning, director of Japanese-manga-based hit romance dramas *It Started With A Kiss* (2005) and *They Kiss Again* (2007), ***In Time With You*** was the ratings champion of 2011, and broke records at Taiwan's Golden Bell TV awards, winning seven out of its eight nominated categories. The finished tape was sold into China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Canada and the USA, while the format sold to South Korea and China – where it has been adapted twice, in 2018 and 2020.

The series follows Cheng You Qing, a 30-year-old career woman who starts feeling panic over her age and makes a bet with her male best friend, Li Da Ren, on who will get married first before the age of 35. The two long-time friends then embark on a journey to seek their perfect partners, only to gradually realise that they have fallen for each other.

In Time with You is a realistic and relatable urban romance story featuring a topic that global audiences cannot get enough of: can pure friendship exist between a man and a woman? The characters are well-rounded and well-developed, with complex personalities that play out in different ways across the series. The heroine is stubborn, assertive, and feisty, but she is also confident, dedicated to her work, and cares for her family and friends. It's a classic romantic comedy setup, with situations and archetypes familiar from not just Asian drama but hit western movies and TV shows such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Sex and the City*.

INTERVIEW: Mandy Chen, Copyright Management, Gala Television Corporation (GTV)

K7: What's your best performing drama genre?

CHEN: *Romance. The love story is enduring!*

K7: In Time With You was a huge hit with Taiwanese audiences. What is the core appeal of the series?

CHEN: *As Cheng You Qing, the main female character in the drama, says: "I will use my own money, buy my own bag, and pack my own story in the bag." Eleven years have passed, but many lines still resonate with current audiences. The success of the script, the talent of the director, and the excellent performances from the actors and actresses successfully made the story resonate with the audience. The audience often discovered that they also have a "special friend" like Li Da Ren around themselves, and the audience's devotion grew through the series.*

K7: What has been the international reaction to the series over the last decade?

CHEN: *So far, the broadcasting rights for the original version have been sold to China, Japan, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Middle East, and the Americas. The authorised remakes include China, South Korea, Thailand, and Japan. Each version combines local flavours and charm, but remakes are completed under the premise of not changing the script. Korea was the first country to get in touch for a remake, then China, Japan, and most recently Thailand. There are basically no cultural differences to be overcome in each Asian remake.*

K7: How did you first take the show to market?

CHEN: *Our existing clients inquired about the title, but during the TV trade markets we also received inquiries. It's not up to me to decide whether it is suitable for the American and European market but of course we hope that they will pay more attention to our series, which will lead to the idea of an English-language remake!*



Mandy Chen,
Copyright Management
Gala Television Corporation
(GTV)



Someday or One Day (想見你)

13x90'

Production: San Feng Limited Companies

Distribution: San Feng Limited Companies

First Tx: November 2019

This time-travel romance was a slow-burning hit for free-to-air terrestrial channel CTV. Ratings grew across the series from 0.54% to eventually top its slot with a 3.23% rating among the young audience (20 - 44 year-old) in the finale.

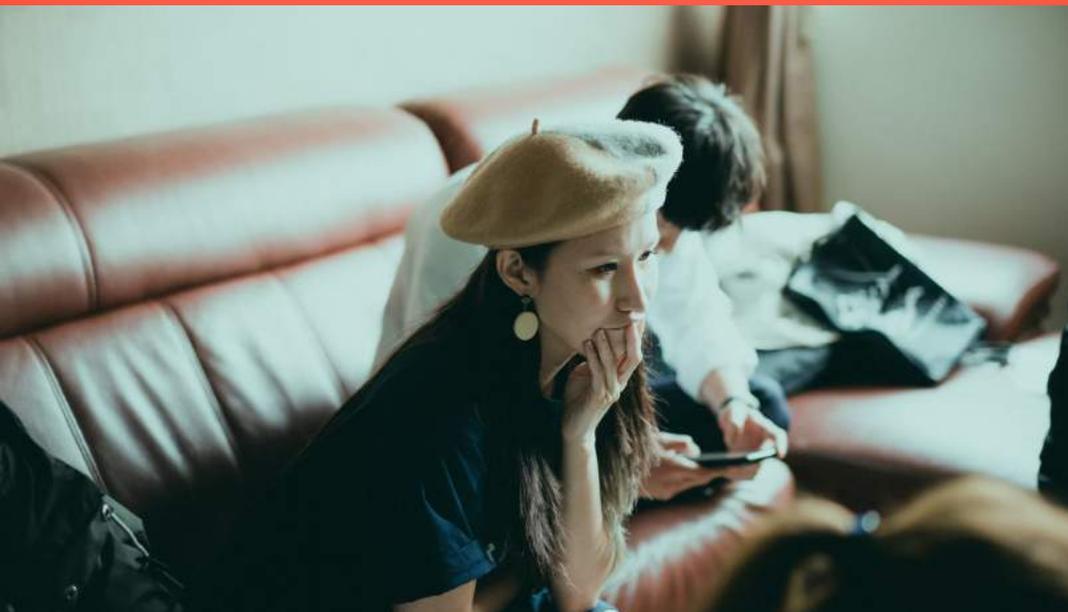
The series follows Huang Yu-Xuan, a 27-year-old woman whose world is shaken when her boyfriend, Wang Quan-Sheng, dies. Then, one day, she wakes up in 1998 as a 17-year-old again. Now she must navigate past and present, and decide between a young man who looks just like her boyfriend, and another suitor who also has a crush on her.

Youth, love and the idea of changing past mistakes are themes that audiences love and ***Someday or One Day*** blends those with mystery and an intricate structure in which the past and the present are intertwined and mutually influence each other. The heart-fluttering romance and entangled relationships took viewers on an emotional roller coaster ride, with main characters each playing two roles and contributing multiple clues to the constantly shifting timeline.

Common teen issues in everyday life, such as family ties, campus violence, mental health, and self-identity are also portrayed. It is all these issues that give the series the depth that helped it build its audience from almost nothing to ratings-busting success: how should ordinary people reconcile with themselves, and live their best life?

Following the huge success in Taiwan, the finished tape has been broadcast in China, South Korea, Japan, and Malaysia. It is also available for streaming on OTT platforms including Netflix Korea, Disney+ and Viki. A Korean remake, under the title *A Time Called You*, will launch on Netflix in 2023.

INTERVIEW: Phoebe Ma, Producer, San Feng Limited Companies



Phoebe Ma, Producer
San Feng Limited Companies

K7: It's harder and harder to stand out from global premium dramas that are accessible in Taiwan, What do you think helped *Someday or One Day* build its audience in the face of so much competition?

MA: *Someday or One Day* is very novel in its themes. The narrative structure is ingenious. The plots and stories are layered over one another, bringing the audience a refreshing perspective. In the casting, we did not consider well-known actors and instead chose the most suitable actors and actresses for the roles. Through the excellent performances from our carefully selected actors and actresses, the audience got on board with the journey of each character.

For example, the audience gets to relate to the heroine Huang Yu-Xuan's loss for her lover, Chen Yun-Ru's desire to be loved and understood, Li Zi-Wei's suffering and longing for love, as well as Mo Jun-Jie's sincerity in love. These characters' devotions to love are relatable to the viewers and help put viewers in the shoes of the characters.

The characters have developed such complex emotions and feelings because we, the scriptwriters and producers, were given enough time for the creative process. The script alone took about three years to conceive and about a year and a half to produce. We firmly believe that good work can only be born if you not only tell the story movingly but also build the characters vividly. The key message in this drama is that "everyone is unique and has the freedom to be loved" and all the above mentioned hard work has helped us spread this message.

K7: We understand that several Korean companies were interested in picking up the remake rights. What can you tell us about that negotiation process and how you have approached it?

MA: Initially there were eight or nine companies inquiring and negotiating about the remake of the drama, all of which were well-known companies from South Korea. After some research and filtering, we got down to two remaining companies. We then did an in-depth evaluation and comparison, and then chose our current partner company. There are three reasons. One is that we do not want the IP to be remade by different companies in different forms, so we chose the company that can buy the series and film remake rights together. The second reason is that of the final two candidates, one of them shared similar production values with us. Lastly, we were moved by their sincerity. We spent half a year discussing back and forth before we signed the deal.

K7: How involved will you be with the Korean adaptation, and how much freedom does your partner company have to make changes?

MA: Because we have spent a lot of time communicating with each other about the ideas and conditions for the remake of the work before we signed the deal, and because there are strict restrictions written in the contract, we agreed to only make changes to reflect localisations. Both parties also regularly communicated every week in the early stage of the collaboration. As we have built trust we do not interfere too much directly in the creation of the remake. Basically, they will maintain the originality of this IP, and then make some localised adaptations, for example: Tainan's snack hotpot noodle dish has become a Korean specialty dish, and the character's occupations have been adjusted, but we cannot disclose too much. Please look forward to the news released by Netflix Korea.

K7: Have any other countries expressed interest?

MA: We are currently discussing remakes with companies from Japan and Thailand. Most of the big companies contact our company through referrals and inquiries from their peers. They also contact our company through the window of larger Taiwanese distribution/broadcasting companies. Other overseas companies leave messages in our company's mailbox on the official website. All the above mentioned inquiries are at the stage of discussion only. We are taking a more cautious attitude and choosing our partners carefully. It's important that we find someone that understands our values.



We highly respect the original scriptwriters in Taiwan. We want the original scriptwriters to be involved in remakes, and credited properly on screen and in the contracts. The original scriptwriters should be able to review the remake script. We insist on a lot and hope to be patient when finding adaptation partners so we can protect our brands and our scriptwriters. Never sell a great original story at a cheap price recklessly.



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and will not interfere with our topic selections so we can create the best work, getting the top media exposure.

But now we are adding a sub-line production project to the main “one title every two years” line. The sub-line project will allow us to create more diverse projects. We will ensure the quality of the drama remains unchanged despite aiming to produce one drama title per year. In the past, most of San Feng Limited Companies's works were romance. However, this year we are bringing the audience a dark comedy. In the future, we also plan to conduct cross-regional and cross-industry cooperation. In addition, we will continue to develop and produce original works, but we will not exclude adapting excellent IPs from around the world. I hope San Feng Limited Companies can stand firmly in the Asian drama market and own a place in the market share.

K7: How has the arrival of global streaming platforms changed Taiwan's creative landscape?

MA: It may bring more opportunities for Taiwanese dramas, but I personally have mixed feelings, because what follows is "the production fee is rising", but "our investment cost is more difficult to get back". The production cost of dramas has gone from several million Taiwanese dollars per episode in the past, to ten million Taiwanese dollars or more per episode now. In addition, relying on government subsidies is by no means a long-term solution. When some works on the market are unable to recover their costs independently, how can Taiwanese dramas continue to gain a foothold in such a competitive market and have a sound business model? This is a hard question. People are worried, so to me, I think we need to cultivate more talent, develop good stories, and produce high-quality creations in order to attract the attention of international partners who are willing to invest in Taiwanese dramas. This way, Taiwanese dramas have more advantage to gain a foothold in the global market.

K7: What are the future plans for San Feng Limited Companies?

MA: In the past, San Feng Limited Companies would be incubating a drama for about two years. We believe that slow work and meticulous work guarantee the best quality titles. Our parent company Jason's Entertainment has entered the capital market in 2016, which caused a big change for San Feng Limited Companies. The chairman of the group has always given me a lot of creative space

The common strengths of Taiwan's drama industry

All three shows profiled here share common success factors. First, they all centre around **universal themes that cross cultural boundaries**. Love, of course, is the foundation. But beyond that, topics such as family, career, self-identification and personal growth are also explored.

Secondly, they all feature **heroines with aspirational attitudes**; female leads that resonate with female audiences. The female characters' philosophies regarding life, relationships, and work have affected many viewers, and some of their more popular quotes are still viral on the Internet.

Third, the nature of **"idol drama"** means that the chemistry among the main leads is strong, and they really bring their characters to life. Both fantastic acting, even in supporting roles, and meaningful storylines contribute to the popularity of these series.

Fourth, whilst not aforementioned in this report, they all have brilliant **original pop soundtracks** that perfectly match the vibe of the show - helping the series extend its popularity beyond the TV schedule and into the wider pop culture. Just as with Korean pop music and drama, there is a symbiotic relationship here that has paid off in extraordinary fashion with fan devotion unseen in any other genre.

Finally, Taiwan's own determination to **support, nurture and promote its creative output** means that production companies are emboldened to not only develop commercially viable formats with global appeal, but to have the confidence to demand better deals and insist on compatible business partnerships, building a local industry that looks set to become more and more integral to the international market.

Credits

† Special thanks to the interview responses and assistance from Conny Huang and Alvin Chen from the International Business Department of SETTV CO., LTD; Mandy Chen from the Copyright Management Dept. of GTV Taiwan; Phoebe Ma and Ting Yi Ye from San Feng Limited Companies; and Ting Er Chen from the Department of Strategy and Research of TAICCA.

About TAICCA

† TAICCA was established by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan in June 2019. With the mission of consolidating and accelerating Taiwan's cultural contents industries, TAICCA facilitates international co-production and builds stronger partnerships and professional networks.

For more information visit - [TAICCA](#)

About K7 Media

† Founded in 1998, K7 Media is a global independent organisation providing media intelligence to broadcasters, streaming platforms, distributors and production companies across the world. Drawing on the team's extensive knowledge of the international TV and digital sector to produce personalised research, showreels and reports, K7 Media is retained as a trusted source of industry insight for clients across the world.

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