



# Taiwan: An Emerging Co-Production Powerhouse



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# Introduction

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If one of the key indicators that a country is an emerging market for scripted television is a rush of international co-productions, then Taiwan is more than ready to step onto the world stage. The last five years have seen major international media companies go from snapping up Taiwanese drama hits to partnering with local production companies and broadcasters directly to help develop new IPs for worldwide release.

This report contains case studies of three such projects, each of which showcases something unique about Taiwan's creative talent.

***The Teenage Psychic*** debuted in 2017 on public broadcaster PTS (Public Television Service). The supernatural drama was developed by PTS from a short film. IFA Media, a Singaporean production company specialising in documentaries, dramas, and branded content, saw potential in the show and brought it to the attention of HBO Asia, which invested in the series with an eye on pan-Asian release as well as global streaming.

What makes *The Teenage Psychic* especially interesting is that its content is extremely specific to Taiwan. Local Taoist beliefs and folklore play a central role in the story, while the main character also works for her local temple. Rather than minimise the culturally specific details for global viewers, PTS instead leaned into them.

The idea that shows must be as blandly universal as possible in order to appeal to overseas viewers is woefully out of date, as the democratised access that streaming allows has encouraged a generation of viewers who are far more open-minded and, indeed, are eager to learn more about life and culture in other countries. The explosion in popularity of Korean drama in the West is just one indicator of this shift, and *The Teenage Psychic* demonstrates how a compelling narrative hook combined with cultural specificity is now actually a recipe for success. And with a rich, deep, eclectic culture to draw on, Taiwan is well placed to capitalise on this.

***Plus & Minus***, which launched in April 2022 on Taiwanese streamer CATCHPLAY+ as well as other VODs such as VideoMarket and RakutenTV in Japan, illustrates another area in which Asia – and Taiwan in particular – are operating far in advance of other territories.

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The show is an example of BL, or “boys' love”, a genre of LGBTQ+ drama that has rocketed to success, and is especially appealing to young western viewers whose own media landscape still largely balks from depicting homosexuality in mainstream programming. BL shows are unashamedly romantic and fill a content niche that broadcasters in other countries are often not serving.

Taiwan was the first Asian country to legalise same sex marriage in 2019, but BL drama had been trending in its media for several years beforehand, most notably in the anthology drama *HiStory*, which produced seven standalone series exploring gay romance from 2017 to 2019. Some were shortform 4x20' miniseries, while others ran for as many as 20 episodes.

Early storylines often came up with a supernatural contrivance to justify the male affection on display – the four-part story ***My Hero***, for example, had a female ghost possess her lover's best friend in order to remain close to him, with the result that her ex-boyfriend found himself falling in love with a man. Such gimmicks were quickly abandoned, however, leading to much simpler storylines grounded in real life relationships.

Finally, ***Mom, Don't Do That!***, which launched on Netflix and was co-produced by CJ ENM HK with investment from multiple Asian producers, demonstrates that Taiwan can deliver crowd-pleasing mass market comedy drama without abandoning its unique voice.

The show, based on a popular novel, follows a trajectory familiar in the West from dozens of films and TV shows often dismissively referred to as “chick flicks”. A middle-aged widow decides to stop obsessing over the romantic lives of her daughters and instead sets out to discover what makes her happy. The theme of self-discovery and emotional emancipation is universal and transcends cultures, but *Mom, Don't Do That!* is unashamedly Taiwanese, using cultural norms and references to set up its humour and trusting that global audiences will take such details on board.

The show has been a notable success for Netflix – and Taiwan drama in general. This is partly due to its appeal to Mandarin-speaking audiences in countries around the world, but also because crossover appeal is now the norm. Audiences everywhere crave good stories, told well, with characters they grow to love. If those stories can also open a window into an entirely new culture, then that is seen as a selling point rather than a limitation.

That the likes of Netflix are aware of this means that more co-productions are likely to bear fruit in Taiwan, as it provides access to an entirely new creative industry whose voices feel fresh and exciting to the international market, while appealing to a proven audience already warmed up by Korean drama.

## ***The Teenage Psychic***

2 seasons, S1: 6 x 60', S2: 8 x 60'

**Production:** PTS, HBO Asia and IFA Media

**Distribution:** PTS and HBO Asia

**First Tx:** Sunday 2 April 2017

A 16-year-old girl struggles to live a normal life thanks to psychic abilities that enable her to deliver messages from the dead to their living relatives. As a high school girl, she must deal with the pressures of teenage life and her duties as a temple medium. Adapted from the award-winning short film *The Busy Young Psychic* directed and written by Chen He-Yu, who is also the series' director.

### ***Ratings and Recognition:***

Ratings for season one continuously climbed from 0.8% in the premiere to 4.4% in the last episode, a new high for PTS drama. The first season won trophies for Best Miniseries and Best Supporting Actress in Miniseries at the 52nd Golden Bell Awards. Among those praising the show's success was President Tsai Ing-Wen.



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## INTERVIEW: Jessie Shih, Executive Producer, PTS

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**Jessie Shih, Executive Producer and Senior Researcher**  
PTS

Prior to producing *The Teenage Psychic*, Jessie Shih of Taiwan public broadcaster PTS worked on nature and history documentaries, partnering with the likes of the BBC, ORF and NHK on films such as *Typhoon Island* and *Out of Cradle*. After moving into scripted production with *The Teenage Psychic* she is now a senior researcher at PTS' R&D department. Here she discusses the role of PTS in Taiwan's media landscape, the production of *The Teenage Psychic* and the potential for future co-productions with global partners.

### **K7: What's the role of PTS as a public broadcaster in Taiwan?**

**SHIH:** *Domestically PTS has a mission to create opportunities for young talents in Taiwan. The audio-visual industry market size in Taiwan is small, therefore exporting is the only way to compete with other countries. We don't only aim for Chinese-speaking markets, but also the non-Chinese markets. We make sure talent has enough room to be creative and this creative space also has been monetised, with many successful PTS titles being picked up by local and international channels and streamers.*

*We also shine spotlights on marginalised groups in society and tackle social topics in Taiwan, even controversial ones. Examples are recent comedy hit **Mad Doctor** (村裡來了個暴走女外科), which tells stories of a female surgeon in a remote village and explores the distribution of medical resources and other ethical issues. **On Children** (你的孩子不是你的孩子) criticises the high-stress education system and the relationships between parents and children. The latter was picked up exclusively by Netflix after a 17-minute preview trailer and was the most watched drama on Netflix in Japan when it was launched.*

*In short, PTS is a channel where we take local input and produce global output for Taiwan. We seek coproduction opportunities with overseas partners and we look for pre-sale opportunities for local content.*

## K7: What is your current model for sourcing IPs and productions?

**SHIH:** We work with script writers, and then we invite local streaming platforms such as friDay and myVideo in Taiwan to co-finance the show. They get to stream the title along with PTS but PTS is in charge of the production. Depending on the deal, PTS can also sell the titles to foreign streamers such as Netflix or Disney+.

A recent successful example is **Tears on Fire** (火神的眼淚), produced by PTS, co-financed by myVideo, and has been streaming on Netflix and other local streamers.

We also get funds from TAICCA's Script Cultivation Fund (劇本孵育計畫) to develop more IPs. In addition, every year from the PTS's annual Innovative Stories, we fund students with their professor as the executive producer and make their stories available on TV or in the cinema.



© PTS and HBO Asia

## K7: What are the changes in the Taiwan TV industry you have seen in the past five years?

**SHIH:** Many things have changed in the past five years. I have moved on from the international department to the research department now. Streaming platforms have caught up with the cable channels and due to the global portfolio of programmes offered on the streamers, the audience worldwide are more used to watching foreign shows with dubbing or subtitles. Especially Western audiences with Asian programmes. So, good news for Taiwan. It doesn't matter which "natural languages" are used. Now viewers have much more choice to select content that is of interest and matches what they want.

Nowadays the cable channel buyers don't commission/co-produce as much. They acquire finished tapes. Streamers like Netflix and Disney+ have more commissioning power. At the moment, it looks like Netflix's Taiwanese original **The Victims Game**, which is renewed for a second season, is the most viewed and best reviewed Taiwanese drama on the platform overseas.

When I executive-produced *The Teenage Psychic's* first season, we were one of the first in Taiwan to use the western "show runner" model, unlike the traditional director-led model, and it seems like this is proven to be the most efficient production model when working with international partners. The changes I hope to see are more opportunities for Taiwanese drama IPs to become more popular, not just in Asia but in the Western countries. What has not changed is that "trust and time" are still very important for any international collaborations.



## **K7: Tell us how you found the *Teenage Psychic* IP and how did you go about promoting it to co-production partners internationally?**

**SHIH:** *The initial idea of this IP came from **The Young Busy Psychic** which was a short film from PTS's Innovative Story strand. We have an open call each year and commission academy students, most of them for their graduation work. Teenage Psychic came from a very young talented writer/director Chen He-Yu. He made his 30-minute short film in 2011 when he was a student at the age 25. The script was inspired by an interview in the Apple Daily newspaper, about a psychic who can see the two worlds, human and ghosts, and her struggle to live a normal life.*

*I saw the global appeal in this IP. In short, it's about a young psychic, who has two lives. One in daytime, and the other at night. The character set up is very unique. She helps people solve daily life worries. She suffered but the tone was light, so the audience likes its black humour. Taoism temple's lifestyles and beliefs are very local while it is about a teenage girl's coming-of-age which is super universal. This coming-of-age theme, later become one of the most important success factors of the mini-series. I introduced it to many foreign industrial friends from my past networking efforts.*

*There was an International Public TV Conference (INPUT) screening session held in Finland and from there, I heard really amazing feedback. The drama head of YLE Finland came to me and said: "This director is a rising star! He knew how to use contrasting colour schemes and scenes instead of CGI to put the night-time temple in comparison to the daytime school; reflecting two very different lives of the main character is just brilliant. This drama is not too scary too, very family friendly" while the head of teenage programming at Japan NHK also expressed that "I can't wait to see what's going to happen following this premiere". These reactions gave me great confidence and found the partners IFA Media and HBO Asia.*

*IFA has been working with PTS Taiwan on the past projects such as **A Town called Success** (戰浪). We had a trusted relationship while IFA had abundant experience working with international media companies, therefore when IFA was on board, HBO had more confidence in investing this project. In addition, there is a potential in the series for returning seasons, and the commissioner from HBO Asia believed that there's a market in Asia for it. The *Teenage Psychic* was the first Chinese language drama project that HBO Asia coproduced with others.*

*The two brands, HBO and PTS, both benefited from this title. HBO Asia got creative and fresh content and PTS, who is non-commercial driven and brand-centred, got premium quality drama that live up to viewers' expectations. We also made sure that PTS was involved from a very early stage to learn the know-how of co-producing a scripted series.*



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**K7: How did PTS work with all the parties (the script writer/director, IFA, and HBO) on *The Teenage Psychic*?**

*SHIH: Working with HBO Asia and IFA Media had been a treat. We spent more time initially building trust and making sure our values creating for our audience and aim to the content character's set up and transformation were met. HBO Asia gave opportunities and financial resources to young talents and content IPs. And I made sure HBO's investment was well returned.*

*Director Chen has lots of great ideas and it was a balancing act to manage the talents and ideas under the budget and time limit. From story arc to character development, we spent a lot of time discussing the settings.*

*Taiwan has been following a system that the directors are mostly the decision makers, unlike the show runner hierarchy, but on this title, we have three executive producers: me from PTS Taiwan, one from IFA Media and one from HBO Asia. It is worth noting that for future co-productions with foreign partners, the executive producers should be aware the need to communicate with Taiwanese TV production teams to adjust their mindset and workflows.*

**K7: The production team on *The Teenage Psychic* had an average age of 30. What is your experience of young creatives in Taiwan?**

*SHIH: Working with young talents from Taiwan was inspiring. Despite their young age, they had so much potential for growth. Young producers were mature, open minded and very down to earth. The director was creative. They made the whole international collaboration with HBO Asia and IFA media more interesting.*

*Taiwan has world-class talents and Taiwan's geopolitical openness offers unlimited room for young talents to tell stories, ranging from politics to LGBTQ topics, and PTS always gives support to a wide range of ideas from young talents.*

*I feel that there are so many great talents in Taiwan. It's the "bigger environment" that is not ready for them. The show runner and producer system need to be established. Opportunities and investments are still being taken by bigger names. Currently there are not that many big names existing in Taiwan, not enough talents known domestically and internationally. Time is needed to change for a better environment. The market scale of Taiwan is still small so our creative projects always need to travel abroad to develop better and bigger values.*

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### **K7: What challenges did the production encounter, and how did you solve them?**

**SHIH:** *For a young team to only use a week to shoot a 30-minute short film is one thing, but the production for a full 6-episode series, one week per one cinematic episode, was a challenge at first in terms of scheduling. Therefore we recruited a bigger team, who were all filmmakers, to work more efficiently.*

*Also, the drama was produced five years ago. Back then we had to persuade HBO Asia to allow audio spoken in Mandarin Chinese as well as Taiwanese dialect, so the stories are told in the characters' natural languages. Nowadays with global streamers' prevalence, characters' natural languages are encouraged. However, Singapore did not allow non-Mandarin shows on TV so we had to re-edit for Singapore and dubbed the Taiwanese language over with Mandarin voices.*

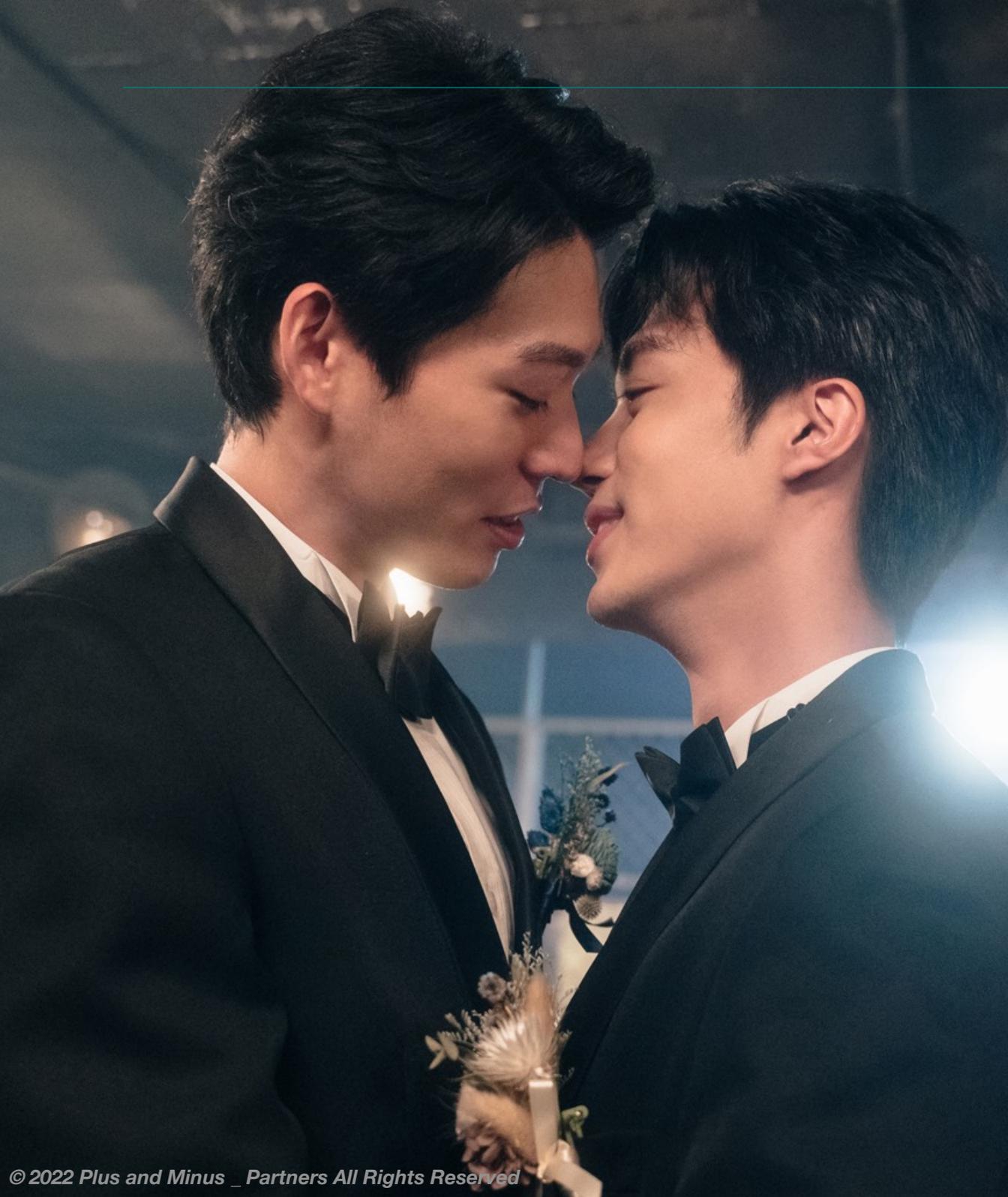
*We also swapped the character's school club from baseball club to drama club because baseball is not so popular in some Southeast Asian countries. Lastly, one scene in the script, in which the characters burn a written charm above holy water, had to be edited out in some versions to meet the TV regulations regarding religious taboos. For streamers, maybe it's easier.*

### **K7: What are the popular drama themes from Taiwan that you feel have untapped potential?**

**SHIH:** *The Teenage Psychic is really about people's desire, and this is universal. People's religions reflect their life values. Therefore, despite this drama being based on local Taoist beliefs, people from all religions can relate to the characters' desire and struggle. People go to temple or church or mosque or synagogue when they encounter challenges in life. This is the universal appeal and basic setting of this drama.*

*So I don't think it is one specific theme that can get international exposure and opportunities. We should see what the elements in each story are and highlight those unique ones that only belong to our cultures. No one can tell our stories better than us; thus we get chances to be seen on the global platforms.*

*If I had to choose one genre that might have a high chance to shine, I think workplace shows are something Taiwan can continue developing. It's episodic and serial-driven and can always end with a hook. Taiwan as a self-governed democratic country, we have the full liberty to explore social issues and this freedom can be applied by niche realistic social issues.*



## Plus & Minus

One season, 12 x 25' plus one special episode

**Production:** TAICCA, Rakuten Group, Inc., SPO Entertainment, Video Market Corporation, CATCHPLAY

**Distribution:** CATCHPLAY+ (Taiwan), Rakuten TV(Japan), Video Market (Japan)

**First Tx:** Friday 15 April 2022

**Plus & Minus** follows the love stories between four men. Two are good friends who have grown up together and work for the same company. Their relationship is then shaken by an accident. At the same time, a divorced laundromat owner who cannot let go of the past gets involved in the colourful nightlife of a free-spirited bartender. All their lives and desires start to entangle.

### **Ratings and Recognition:**

As of 3 October 2022, it is rated 7.9/10 by 6,137 users on MyDramaList review site. The drama ranked first on Taiwanese SVOD CATCHPLAY+ for similar Taiwanese series within the same genre; won the best popularity vote; ranks No. 2 overall on the Japanese platform Rakuten TV and was number one in its first month of on-demand viewing. It was also the Top Taiwanese Video Market drama. Three days after the first two episodes launched on GagaOOLala platform, each episode attracted over 5,000 visits and on the fifth day it was in the top 5 on the global BL on-demand list. From 24 August to 18 September 2022, it was shown in SM Cinema, the largest movie theatre operator in the Philippines.

## INTERVIEW: Anita Sung, Chief Producer, Video Market Corporation



Anita Sung, Chief Producer  
Video Market Corporation

Anita Sung, Chief Producer of Video On Demand Business Department of Video Market Corporation, has extensive experience in the production and distribution of the BL, or “Boys’ Love”, genre, an Asian drama phenomenon featuring romantic series. Among her previous successes are **Be Loved in House: I Do** (2021) and **See You after Quarantine?** (2021). In the following interview she describes the process of selling these popular shows across Asia and globally, as well as the cultural advantages Taiwan enjoys in producing BL drama.

**K7: How did your previous experience in the TV industry help you produce and promote this particular series?**

**SUNG:** *Previously I worked for SPO Entertainment, a Japanese company, where I purchased Taiwan drama series so I got to know a lot of Taiwanese TV professionals. We bought the first season of **HIStory**, setting a precedent for Taiwan BL drama’s releases in Japan. Then I moved job to a new media platform in Japan known as Video Market and purchased more HIStory series and other Taiwan BL dramas. All were well received in the Japanese market, and I got to know many creators and performers of Taiwan BL series as well as partners from the Taiwanese Creative Content Agent (TAICCA). **Plus & Minus** was jointly developed*

*with Japanese partners and meets the TAICCA criteria for international cooperation and Investment. So TAICCA funded the production. Thanks to my network in Taiwan, I managed to promote it at the Taiwan Creative Content Fest (TCCF), which grabbed the attention of the local Taiwanese stream platforms which helped bring **Plus & Minus** to screens.*

**K7: What is the advantage of Taiwan-made LGBTQ shows in comparison with those made in other Asian and international markets?**

**SUNG:** *Based on our previous experiences of distributing Taiwan BL dramas in Japan, our creative team analyses the preferences of Japanese viewers who love Taiwan BL dramas via social media data. Taiwan BL is different from the fresh and innocent style of Korean BL, the artistic style of Japanese BL, and the passionate style of Thai BL, and has a perfect combination of reality and romantic comedy with popular idols. Importantly, same-sex marriage has been legalised in Taiwan and our stories can openly cover plots of happy marriage between two princes, or even divorce, which might be difficult in other Asian countries. Taiwan BL has a well-established market and audience. Its advantage lies in its very competitive CP (Cost-Performance Ratio) and freedom to accommodate a wide scope of stories.*

## K7: Can you share the whole story of this co-production?

**SUNG:** Once filming our previous production *Be Loved in House: I Do* finished, our creative team moved onto create our next story. Very soon we decided that “two childhood sweethearts with contrary personalities” was to be the theme. We borrowed the concept of plus and minus from physics to depict two unlikely lovers with completely different personalities attracted to each other. It took the team over four months to develop the script and luckily investors from Japan confirmed that they would continue sponsoring the project because *Be Loved in House: I Do* was so successful.

During the script development stage, we also received development grants for international joint production from TAICCA's Taiwan's International Co-funding Program. In 2021, we promoted the project at TCCF, which led to more investment from a Taiwan SVOD platform CATCHPLAY+. So we received the investment and started full production. As before, we managed to sign broadcasting contracts with overseas platforms even before transmission. Over 180 countries and regions simultaneously transmitted the show along with Taiwan. After the first transmission, more overseas video platforms got in touch. They have now either completed their purchasing contracts or are in the middle of negotiation.

## K7: Each episode is 25 minutes. Is this length aimed to fit the viewing habits of a young audience or are there other reasons?

**SUNG:** Having done our research, we realise that most web drama series usually last for 25-30 minutes. This length is perfect for viewers watching one episode on their mobiles on their commute. If it's shorter than 25 minutes, then it's difficult to tell a complete story.

## K7: How important is social media in promoting a show like this, and how do you build interest?

**SUNG:** Before shooting starts, we have specific plans to launch our official accounts on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. On the first day of the filming, we begin to release updates across these three communities simultaneously. We also work with other Taiwan BL networks and Taiwan BL fans to make sure they know what is going on. During the filming, we regularly share bespoke working photos on these platforms and allowed the star actors to communicate with the audience by posting articles. After the release, due to the Covid outbreak in Taiwan, many publicity announcements were cancelled, but we continued to live stream on Instagram every week so that actors and fans could stay in touch. After the livestream, actors update their posts on social media to keep the buzz going. Instagram followers for each of the two main CP characters increased by more than 100,000. A single post on the official Instagram account now reaches half a million followers.



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**K7: What are the challenges in communicating with different investors and sponsors, and what are the lessons you have learned that can be applied to future co-productions?**

**SUNG:** *The biggest challenge with multiple investors is to understand the unique culture and policy of each company, especially when our work is financed by both commercial international companies and agencies with a government background. Each investor's demands need to be carefully considered, and all stakeholders need to understand each other as well. We try to use our expertise to achieve efficient and effective communication while avoiding unnecessary misunderstandings. We always endeavour to figure out the best way of communication at an early stage.*

**K7: This drama was promoted at the TCCF, sponsored by TAICCA. What other support have you got from TAICCA?**

**SUNG:** *TAICCA invests 30 percent of the production fees and issued an official announcement when the shooting started so everyone will know **Plus & Minus** is the first TAICCA-financed Taiwanese BL drama.*

**K7: The involvement of international companies has elevated the production scale and value of the show. What kind of business model does the show take to cover production costs and investment?**

**SUNG:** *Even at the script development stage, we estimated the possible income and profits of each transmission platform and then worked out the matching production costs. This is a unique business model.*

**K7: Are there any new co-production projects with Taiwan partners planned?**

**SUNG:** *We will continue working with our current partners in Japan including Rakuten TV and SPO Entertainment and continue our collaboration with TAICCA to develop new Taiwanese BL dramas. Our goal is to make at least one Taiwan BL drama targeted at the overseas market every year.*

# Mom, Don't Do That!

One season, 11 x 50'

**Production:** Butt Mountain Co.,Ltd 、 CJ ENM HK 、 Missmove Image Studio

**Distribution:** Netflix

**First Tx:** Friday 15 July 2022

After her husband's death, a 60-year-old mother begins to worry about the chances of marriage for her two daughters—one has relationship anxiety, and the other one always dates bad guys. Instead of betting the rest of her life on her daughters, the mother instead decides to pursue her own happiness, and finally marries a man in Australia through online dating. The series is based on Chen Mingmin's novel *My Mom's Intercultural Marriage*. The series saw the return to TV of popular singer-actress Billie Wang after a 15-year hiatus.

## **Ratings and Recognition:**

**Mom, Don't Do That!** won the audience award at the Taipei Film Festival in July 2022. The official teaser hit over 240,000 views within eight days after releasing on the YouTube channel of Netflix Asia. More than 300 comments are left by the awaiting viewers, mostly expecting the premiere, praising the production quality and the all-star cast. Tweets about the series have been posted in English, Japanese, Korean, and Thai.



## INTERVIEW: Sarso Chou, Executive Producer, Butt Mountain Co.,Ltd



**Sarso Chou, Executive Producer**  
Butt Mountain Co.,Ltd

Sarso Chou is a prolific producer of Taiwanese film and television. SARSO is also the name of his own company, and is an acronym meaning “Smile Always and Respect Self Often”. In the interview below he reflects on how years of connections helped to bring in outside investment and the importance of retaining local cultural elements in order to stand out internationally.

### **K7: How did you discover Chen Mingmin’s novel *My Mum’s Foreign Marriage* and turn it into a drama series?**

**CHOU:** *Our director Chen Huiling had noticed the popularity of Chen Mingmin’s work when it was serialized on the PTT (an online bulletin board) even before its formal publication. Once the novel was published, Mingmin received many adaptation requests, but most of them involved changing the age of the mum, the key character in the novel.*

*It was by accident that we were introduced to Mingmin by a writer named Huang Dami. From the very first meeting, we shared a common view, and decided to work together. We all agreed that this is a novel with a unique and intriguing story, perfect for a screen comedy.*

### **K7: Can you share with us how CJ ENM HK came aboard the project?**

**CHOU:** *From the moment the project kicked off, we made great efforts to raise its publicity. In 2019, we attended a TV Press Conference in Taipei, introducing it to journalists and media people. Constant promotion grabbed the attention of the market and investors, who began to get in touch.*

*Later, via the introduction of Ms Cai Yalin from our international distribution team, we got in touch with Michael Jung, the Managing Director of CJ ENM HK. Having met our team and cast, read our scripts, and conducted the market and media impact estimates, we reached a consensus for co-production and investments. In March 2021, we held a press conference with CJ announcing this co-production project and released the promo trailer of **Mom, Don't Do That!**, creating quite a buzz with the public and media.*

*We are very grateful to all the investors, including One Shot Entertainment Limited, CJ ENM HK, M Star Entertainment Ltd, Amuse Entertainment Taiwan Inc, Arrow Cinematic Group Inc, Butt Mountain Co. Ltd, Missmove Image Studio, and Yuan Lai Media Entertainment Co., Ltd. Thank you so much for your trust and support to make the production possible.*

**K7: Multiple dialects such as Hakka and Taiwanese and unique local stories reflecting Taiwanese culture resonated with audiences. Do you think international platforms and Korean investors are positive about these unique local elements?**

**CHOU:** Directors and scriptwriters of this series decided from the very beginning to keep the dialects and cultural plotlines. As more creatives joined the team, including art directors, set designers, cinematographers, make-up artists and actors, more creative sparks were inspired, injecting even more comedy into the work. Whether it was singing, dancing, action sketches, traditional Taiwanese 8 o'clock melodramas or famous characters from wuxia novels such as Little Dragon Girl or Master Mijue, we made a deliberate decision to stay true to authentic Taiwanese culture. Our investors CJ and Netflix were not always sure about these local Taiwanese elements but after talking it through, they agreed these elements would make *Mom, Don't Do That!* even more interesting.

We believe the content must first resonate with Taiwan audiences, then it will have the opportunity to connect to audiences in other countries and go international.

**K7: What themes and messages were you exploring with this series?**

**CHOU:** The key message of *Mom, Don't Do That!* is that all women, regardless of age, have the right to pursue their own happiness. 60-year-old Meimei, though losing her husband, still searches for a real love with courage and bravery and finds her happiness in Australia. Rurong, the older sister, has no interest in marriage or dating and devotes all her energy to work and writing. She believes she'd never come across anyone better than her dad. The youngest sister Xiaomin longs for being loved, complimented and not alone. She'd rather tolerate the nasty man Xiaozha than be alone. Three women at different ages have different values towards love and life. What we wanted to discuss is not to judge who is right or wrong but the fact that no matter how old you are, you still have the right to be happy. The most important thing is to be brave to take the first step.

Another key message is the theme of farewell. After the death of the dad, the three women go through five years of self-denial and depression. They even hurt each other to make themselves feel better by not forgiving each other. But gradually they learn from life and bid farewell to their dad in their own ways. What the audience learns is we all need to learn to wave goodbye to our past.





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For example, Shao Hsin was involved in **On Children**, playing the bad boy. Elsie Yeh played Xiao Zha's Mum this time. Chung Hsin-Ling's character in this series is a woman looking after her family and seriously ill father-in-law. The role is similar to her character Mum Xiaoyuan in the previous film **Child of the Cat**.

Actor Bryan Chang and Actress Jian Man Shu starred in 2010 romance series **Year of the Rain** and in *Mom, Don't Do That!* they also play a couple and continue their lasting love stories.

I want to thank all the talented actors and actresses in the series. Their brilliant performance makes our work rich and solid. Our playwright once says, "Without thousands of leaves, there would be no forest." This truly describes everyone in our production.

**K7: What are the challenges of making comedy compared with the more famous romantic dramas made in Taiwan?**

**CHOU:** *Our world needs comedy, more laughs and warmth. But making the audience laugh is much more difficult than making them cry. The production of this show is very different from our previous work in other genres such as idol dramas. Its characters, pace, movement of the cast, their emotions and personality as well as the editing, special effects, music, sounds etc, are all different. Our director and scriptwriter even attended a comedy writing course run by Yuan Qiongqiong, a famous comedy writer. During the filming, all the cast were fully dedicated to their character. There were a lot of on-the-spot improvisation and creative contributions.*

**K7: It has an incredible ensemble. What can you tell us about the casting process?**

**CHOU:** *We were so lucky to get [famous Taiwanese singer and actress] Billie involved. She quit acting for 15 years and she was worried and reluctant. It took eight months to change her mind. Our directors, scriptwriters, Alice Ko and Alyssa Chia all went to see her in person, and we even asked her son Zhou Tanghao to help us. Finally, she agreed to join.*

*Many of the excellent actors and actresses were in our previous shows.*

**K7: The show has been very successful on Netflix. What were your expectations for debuting on a global streaming service of that size?**

**CHOU:** *We were very confident of our content in Taiwan. At its premiere at The Taipei Film Festival, the feedback was extremely positive, and won the audience vote.*

*When we started publicity, we followed the YouTube trailer viewing data. We knew in places like the US, Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, that ethnic Chinese viewers were on the rise. We always believed that Mom, Don't Do That! would achieve good visibility in international markets.*

**K7: Do you think adapting a book is the safest way to create a show? Will you repeat the same model in the future?**

**CHOU:** *A book has an established story structure with characters and plots, so ideal for adaptation. Buying international drama IP is also a good option. But using original IP means we must stick to the core concept and format.*

*The motto of my company SARSO is "Smile Always and Respect Self Often". Stay positive and be true to oneself. So long as the story is good, we are keen to get involved through adaptation or buying international formats. We will prioritise original Taiwan IPs so we can tell our own stories and make them known to the world.*

**K7: Finally, what are your views on Taiwanese drama right now and its future? What expectations do you have for millennium generation filmmakers in Taiwan?**

**CHOU:** *There have been a lot of changes. Between 2018 and 2020, there were only a few genres in the market. But that's changing dramatically, and the number of productions is growing. Platforms and broadcasters have much more choice. We will continue to develop and produce more films and TV series while keeping an eye on the changing needs of the market.*

*Honestly speaking, the screen industry is hard work. We are driven by passion and a sense of idealism. I hope that everyone can find his or her own target. Whatever you do, I hope you can find friends who share your dream and passion for storytelling. Stay positive, happy, confident, and healthy. Keep smiling every day and enjoy what you do.*



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## Credits

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† Special thanks to the interview responses and assistance from Jessie Shih from PTS; Anita Sung from Video Market Corporation; Sarso Chou from Butt Mountain Co.,Ltd; and Ting-Er Chen from the Department of Strategy and Research of TAICCA.

## About **TAICCA**

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† 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**

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† 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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