

Are we suddenly cried out for saving Taiwan public  
service media ? A challenge to or affirmation with  
de-colonialization behind historical drama

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## Abstract

On January 14, 2025, during the parliamentary session reviewing the budget bill, the majority presented several proposals to modify the total appropriations of the National Government. One critical motion proposed by a key member of the Nationalist Party seeks to eliminate all funding for public service media. This marks the first official initiative documented in parliament to completely shut down the public television institute.

Behind the dispute over cutting PSM's revenue lies a concealed agenda that serves as a prolonged rebuttal to one of the themes presented in the historical drama "Three Tears in Borneo". The TV drama is commissioned by Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS), is set to be broadcast online during the summer session of 2024.

This extended ideological contestation frequently arises during historical reviews of the Sino-Japanese War or the Taiwan occupation period, and it is represented through various forms of communication. PTS endorsed an independent production, creatively directed by young local talent, based on a true story from World War II. However, the characters chosen for this drama are genuine victims who either survived or perished in the prisoner camps of Southeast Asia. In other words, this production is a hybrid form that combines interactive entertainment with documentary elements. After its initial airing on a linear channel, some historians and local history curators expressed resentment towards this portrayal of look liked non-fictional drama, which they felt contained personal biases. They argued that it depicted Mainland Chinese as the plaintiffs, opposing the interests of Taiwanese guards of POWs at the conclusion of the war.

The paper addresses the core argument through a comparative study. It critically examines the contrast between the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS) in their handling of the controversy surrounding the war issue, distinguishing between non-fictional and fictional claims and recognitions. The aftermath of the news genre is clearly analyzed through an

independent Ombudsman report. The fictional narrative partially reflects audience concerns for the sake of creativity. Ultimately, it highlights the political struggles in the Taiwan case by diverting the issue into a legal discussion on copyright infringement, while also leaving the interpretation of colonialism to political discourse without deliberation.

The current moment presents an opportunity to raise concerns and conduct a critical analysis of the historical positioning of public service media in Asia, including Taiwan. The outcome should contribute to Recommendation 10: Media in Countries of Conflict and in Transitional States declared by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD). This declaration states, “In order to strengthen media’s role as a means of communication between elected governments and their constituents and as a peaceful platform for communities to better understand, participate in and decide on conflict related issues”. Based on that, this research posits that a normative framework should be established before PSM is compelled to navigate a new landscape of geopolitics and set sail into uncharted waters.

**Keyword: CBC, Fictional, Historical Drama, Imperial Japan, POWs, PTS, World War II**

# Are we suddenly cried out for saving Taiwan public service media? A challenge to or affirmation with de-colonialization behind historical drama

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## Introduction

On January 14, 2025, during the parliamentary session regarding the budget bill, the majority presented several proposals to modify the total appropriations of the National Government. One critical motion proposed by a key member of the Nationalist Party seeks to eliminate all funding for public service media. This marks the first official initiative documented in parliament to completely shut down the public television institute.

The minority government led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) effectively utilized this individual motion to incite a moral panic within civil society organizations. Without addressing the significant controversy surrounding this decision, the government strategically depicted the majority's intentions as a return to dictatorial rule, undermining the fourth estate and evading accountability. The underlying agenda serves as a prolonged rebuttal to one of the themes presented in the historical drama “Three Tears in Borneo”. The TV drama is commissioned by Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS), is set to be broadcast online during the summer session of 2024.

This represents a recurring ideological contestation that arises whenever the historical narrative surrounding the Sino-Japanese War or the Taiwan occupation period is conveyed through any form of communication. PTS has endorsed an independent production, creatively directed by emerging local talent, based on a true story from World War II. However, the characters chosen for this drama are genuine victims who either survived or perished in the prisoner camps of Southeast Asia. In other words, this production is a hybrid form that combines interactive entertainment with documentary elements. Following its initial airing on a linear channel, some historians and local history curators expressed resentment towards this portrayal of non-fictional drama, which they believe incorporates personal biases. This perspective positions Mainland

Chinese individuals as plaintiffs, opposing the interests of Taiwanese guards of POWs at the conclusion of the war, according to the views of the accusers.

Since the inception of public service broadcasters in Taiwan in 1997, numerous critiques regarding the production of the PTS TV genre have emerged. However, the issue of Three Tears in Borneo is approached from a distinctly political perspective. This research aims to explore the core arguments surrounding the themes of hatred and loss in the aftermath of World War II. A complex triangle of identity and nationalism involving Taiwan, Japan, and Mainland China is likely to provoke intense interactions among viewers of this drama program.

Regarding this historical drama, PTS is credited with the script and production as one of the most successful pitching projects in recent times. Before its debut, the five-episode series gained recognition at Series Mania, an International Panorama Competition held in Lille, France, in March 2024. (Symchuk, 2004) This marks the first Taiwanese series selected for this international event, and the local drama market has applauded this groundbreaking project. Consequently, there has been enthusiastic support and high anticipation for this milestone creative drama long before its summer debut.

However, unexpected resentment toward this drama has emerged following its debut. A long-term investigation into the true events that occurred in the same location is being conducted by the Taiwan Historica affiliated to Academia Historica. Mr. Chan-ping Lee, a Compiler and historian of above institute, has published his critique of the storyline of “Three Tears in Borneo”. As the author of “Marching into Borneo”, historical account of Taiwanese POWs during Second World War is recognized as pioneering research. (Lee, 2005) The drama, which serves as the main annual centerpiece presented by PTS, conflicts with the historian's perspective, raising serious concerns within civil society.

This research reveals that the aftermath of presenting the drama creates a complex interplay of identity, historical consciousness, neo-geopolitics, and parliamentary politics within PSM. It serves as a continuous critique of PTS's production of similar historical events, beginning with the 2021 broadcast the drama of Seqalu: Formosa 1867. However, it is the only drama that has brought the conflict into the realm of budget negotiations during the annual appropriation sessions in parliament.

The following sections will conduct a comparative study based on Canadian experiences. This approach aims to contextualize the Taiwan issue within the historical inquiry of World War II through a global broadcasting perspective. The next step

involves a critical review of how local broadcasters address historical consciousness intertwined with various identities that influence the citizenship of contemporary Taiwan.

Finally, given the necessity of being accountable to its constituency, an analysis of PTS performance in crisis control is particularly relevant today, as far-right politics are gaining traction around the world.

## **A Comparative Study on the CBC and PTS**

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) is a licensed broadcaster with a clear mandate to serve the public. In 1992, the CBC aired a three-episode docudrama titled “The Valour and the Horror.” This series addressed critical issues surrounding Canadian participation in the Second World War. The three-part television series presented the scenarios and narratives of military actions, which included “Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941”; “In Desperate Battle: Normandy 1994”; “Death by Moonlight: Bomber Command.” These military actions were systematically reviewed through a collaboration between the production house and veterans, as well as historians. The controversy surrounding the series stemmed from its final interpretation, which introduced a conspiracy theory regarding the losses incurred during the war.

One of the most comparable scenarios is the defense of Hong Kong. At that time, two battalions, comprising 2,000 soldiers, were dispatched there for garrison purposes at the end of 1941 at the request of British authorities. Due to a lack of training and real experience in using ammunition, these troops were primarily tasked with protecting civilians. Nevertheless, they were ultimately engaged in battle against the Imperial Japanese Army. This confrontation at Wong Nei Chong resulted in 50% of Canadian forces being wounded or killed. Although the casualties were significant, their courage and combat effectiveness have been praised by historians (Ferris, 1994).

The producer, Brian McKennas, who worked on this documentary, is questioning the past policy-making of the Canadian government regarding the deployment of troops to Hong Kong. A conspiracy theory is suggested to underlie the decision to involve Canadians in the war against Japan. The documentary investigation proposes that, as a British colony, Canada was sacrificed first by Britain in its war with Japan (Bercuson, 1994).

“Three Tears in Borneo”, the historical drama produced by PTS and a production house, is the first film to explore the hidden stories of Taiwanese individuals during the

Japanese Occupation. Based on authentic documents and archives, the script depicts a Taiwanese lad who was conscripted to serve as a Prisoner of War (POW) guard in Sarawak (then known as North Borneo). The majority of the prisoners were Australian soldiers. The Taiwanese guards were ordered by the Imperial Japanese Army to punish or oppress the POWs without regard for rank. However, as the end of the war approached, these guards were forced to assume the roles of soldiers and were compelled to follow brutal orders to execute the wounded POWs.

The last episode of the show is building towards a climactic confrontation as the military court investigates and cross-examines the victims and plaintiffs. The defense lawyers are Japanese, and their strategy involves differentiating the prison guards from the soldiers by arguing that the guards culturally misunderstood the order to execute. This part of the historical drama aims to contrast the experiences of Japanese parents and the Taiwanese colony as they both face trial. Ultimately, the defense team struggles to save the lives of the Japanese by attributing the wrongdoing of the evacuation order to the colonized Taiwanese. The Taiwanese prison guard becomes a scapegoat in exchange for the innocence of the Japanese soldiers. The director of the drama profoundly explores the ambivalent position of the Taiwanese during the Second World War in this survival game.

Therefore, “Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941” and “Three Tears in Borneo” share a common theme: the critique of colonialism. Both productions are set against the backdrop of the Second World War. Whether through documentary (docudrama) or drama (historical drama), both pieces aim to uncover hidden histories and advocate for justice. The commitment to serious journalism and historical education is supported by their independent editorial policies.

Based on the evolving interpretation of history, two works have sparked significant controversy and protest among various schools of historians following their broadcast. The aftermath of this situation has led to a prolonged period of accountability to their constituents. “The Valour and the Horror” generated considerable resentment from official historians, who were quickly embroiled in controversy after the TV series aired. The Board of Directors of the CBC invited the Ombudsman to assess this issue by presenting a formal report. During this process, several professional military historians participated in the evaluation of this three-part documentary, assessing its fairness, balance, and accuracy at the request of the CBC.

In the meantime, veterans' groups involved in the aftermath of the series expressed their outrage over the portrayal of their experiences in the war. Many feel that their

contributions are being mocked by the production. This issue ultimately garnered the attention of the Senate of Canada in Parliament Hills, Ottawa. A subcommittee was established to hold hearings on the controversy. Concurrently, the CBC Ombudsman published a report, while the quality press, specifically the Globe and Mail, criticized the Senate subcommittee, labeling it a “Kangaroo court” into invasion on freedom of the press. As tensions escalated regarding freedom of speech, the media began to shape the narrative surrounding the debate.

In November 1992, the CBC Ombudsman Report was released. The writer-producers of the series promptly responded with a vigorous rebuttal, which included questioning the integrity of the Ombudsman's position. This action by the production house was criticized by the Ombudsman, who utilized a commentary report to 10 Galafilm Response. In response to the comments made by Galafilm regarding historians, two professional historical analyses are available for further publication as a memorandum to challenge the producers' disparaging remarks about them.

It is a typical solution for addressing controversies generated by public media broadcasts in citizen and civic forums. Due process, transparency, and documentation are essential components that are reflected in social discussions.

There was a similar incident that occurred last year involving a five-episode television drama. The outcry came from the author of “Marching into Borneo”, Mr. Lee, who is a pioneer in conducting field research on the Taiwanese prison guards sent to Southeast Asia during Second World War. Based on his firsthand research and interviews, he cannot accept the producer's announcement that TV Mini Series is inspired by historical events. All characters in the drama have been fictionalized. the script to his publication, it is evident that one character, who is the sole witness from the prison camp after serving a decade-long sentence, closely follows the real storyline presented in Lee's book.

In the beginning, the issue revolves around the piracy and copyright infringement related to the history book he claimed. The production house is challenged regarding its integrity and respect for the original copyright. In response, PTS has organized a conference in October 2024 to address this issue. The topic will focus on the legal aspects of creativity in historical drama.

This conference established the importance of legality as a primary concern. The speakers included a historian, an intellectual property lawyer, and drama producers. They did not bear the responsibility of being accountable to the public in terms of procedural justice. Consequently, all participants were industry stakeholders. The event



served more as an explanation than as a forum for questioning the ongoing controversy. Notably, the plaintiff did not present his perspective during the conference.

Later, the politicians also joined the debate. One of the key figures in politicizing the critique is a senior journalist, who has garnered support from a group united under a studio of recent Chinese historical images. He elucidated the fallacy of the drama by conflating fiction with fact. Although this faction supported Mr. Lee's infringement claims, they shifted the focus from copyright issues to the conspiracy theories surrounding the script. Consequently, the members of the opposition party in Parliament followed suit, leading a session of inquiries.

Mr. Hsu, the owner of NUEVA VISION CO., LTD., has taken a stand against the ideology presented in the drama “Three Tears in Borneo”, placed a lawsuit in civic court and organized a movement against the producer and PTS. The Nationalist Party has also joined the effort, participating in the budget screening session at the beginning of 2025. A controversial proposal to slash the budget of PTS is stirring public and industry unrest.

The CBC case is approached with corporate standing in accordance with the principles of journalistic integrity. The docudrama, produced as part of this special three-part series, is introduced with the heading “Mixing Actuality with Dramatization,” as clearly cited by the Ombudsman when the critical question was raised. Ultimately, the Ombudsman’s report is guided by CBC's Journalistic Policies and Standards. (Morgan, 1994)

Behind the reporting system, CBC redefined its accountability during a period of controversy. In particular, news and current affairs programming is regarded as the cornerstone of its service to Canadians. When the public questions this programming, a specific focus of study is applied to this issue within the broader context of overall positioning.

From 1992 to 1993, the president of CBC initiated a re-consultation process regarding its journalistic activities. By establishing the Committee on Media Accountability, CBC produced a comprehensive report on its journalistic challenges from 1990 and beyond. Prior to its final publication, the draft report was made available to CBC journalists and social leaders in all relevant fields for their comments. On March 22, 1993, the report was submitted to and approved by the Board of Directors.

Since 1989, the Ombudsman has been deployed through the Office of Journalism Policy and Practices. This Office serves as a fair reviewer of letters addressed to the CBC

President regarding CBC journalism. On September 28, 1992, a task force committee was established to review the Office of the Ombudsman. Consequently, a request for revitalization of the CBC Ombudsman was made. Therefore, a strengthening project aimed at enhancing its independence was initiated on March 23, 1993 (Communications and Public Affairs, 1993).

1. Appointed on the recommendation of a committee consisting of three delegates from the CBC, working journalists and the public.
2. Appointment based on a contract, would be for a maximum duration of five years and would not be renewable.
3. The role of the Ombudsman is “suggest and advise” on revisions to journalistic policy rather “maintain and revise” on it

The context surrounding the Ombudsman's report to the President regarding the controversy of “The Valour and Horror” is significantly shaped by a thorough and impartial approach. To ensure a balanced perspective, the Ombudsman consulted three qualified historians specializing in military history. Additionally, two historians recommended by the writer-producer side were also interviewed. Consequently, the resolution of the controversy is structured by a systematic dialogue. Ultimately, the historians who participated in this process co-edited a book to compile all relevant commentary into a single document (Bercuson and Wise, 1994).

The Taiwan case today has taken a markedly different route. The first step situates the drama under the heading “Creativity Discussion”. The freedom to write scripts should be protected, as it is a hallmark of an advanced democracy. Historical accuracy is only a requirement for producing documentaries. Thus, “Three Tears in Borneo” is merely a drama. Consequently, PTS has only contributed to this controversy by organizing a meeting to discuss intellectual property rights. The only historian who attended that conference was a collaborator with the writer-producer team. However, his remarks served as a reminder to the producer that it lacks common sense to choose the Chinese Consul as the counterpart to the Taiwanese prison guard while speaking in Taiwanese dialect. Moreover, this arrangement has become a focal point for creating political tensions among historians, politicians, producers, and PTS.

The only public gathering for controversy does not involve a comprehensive review. The conference is strictly focused on creativity and copyright debates. However, there is a lack of concern regarding the correlation between history and drama. Generally speaking, this case falls under the purview of the Guidelines for Handling Complaints

Regarding Station Programs. If the complainant disagrees with the station's response, he or she may submit a written application to the Board of Directors.

PTS regulates itself through its bylaws, referred to as the Program Guidelines. However, there is no clear public avenue for individuals to submit complaints. On September 23, 2014, the President established a Program and News Self-Regulatory Committee. This committee consists of 5 to 7 members from civic society and professional groups, along with 2 members representing the News and Programming Department. Each member serves a term of 2 years, which may be renewed once. To address self-regulatory issues, committee members are authorized to submit cases for examination; however, no one else is permitted to do so.

There is no official record of any complaints regarding “Three Tears in Borneo”. The primary criticism of this drama is circulating in alternative media and political circles. Members of the Nationalist Party have repeatedly criticized this drama in light of the subsequent controversy surrounding its interpretation of history. The details of this argument will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

After the comparative study between Taiwan and Canada was conducted, a distinct contrast emerged regarding the aftermath and dispute resolution mechanisms in both territories.

The discussion regarding Canada highlighted concerns related to colonialism, particularly the decision to sacrifice Canadian soldiers rather than dispatch additional British troops to the indefensible Hong Kong. Similarly, the situation in Taiwan raises questions about the colonial status of prison guards, who were chosen as scapegoats to protect the Japanese commander during the execution of Allied prisoners of war. This action violated the international law established by the 1929 Geneva Convention during military trials.

Then, the differing formats of both productions drive the route to held accountable. CBC docudrama “The Valour and the Horror” is evaluated against journalistic standards and practices. The documentary is, in fact, part of a journalism program. The aftermath of its broadcast is thoroughly examined in a comprehensive report. Based on the President's mandate, the Ombudsman should be invited to address the responses to letters sent to the President regarding CBC journalism. Under the Ombudsman's oversight, leading historians in this field were invited to participate in the task. Their discussions had a more significant impact on this issue than the Senate hearings did.

On the contrary, PTS's historical drama “Three Tears in Borneo” remains a work of fiction. The aftermath of this broadcast has led to discussions focused solely on creativity and storytelling, rather than on historical accuracy. A passive procedure has been established internally, awaiting complaints without external prompts to initiate a thorough inquiry. Requests for historical scrutiny were directed to nationalist politicians and civil archive publishing house for critique. Ultimately, the parliamentary session on budget screening gained momentum to hold PTS accountable.

These common and different points should be collected into one chart for quick check.

Table 1. The Contrast of CBC and PTS in dealing with Historical Program

| Program  | Format           | Producer’s critic                                  | Audience contention  | Procedural holding accountable                                   | Solution to aftermath  |
|--|------------------|--|--|--|--|
| The Valour and the Horror-Savage Christmas/<br>CBC | docudrama        | British Colony marching into a mistakable decision | Historian’s disagreement<br>And distortion                                     | Journalist standard and practice<br>Ombudsman led inquiry report | Ombudsman Report<br>Senate Hearing<br>Academic Publishing                                  |
| Three Tears in Borneo/<br>PTS                      | Historical drama | Colonial natives inferior to Imperial Japan        | Piracy to Copyright<br>Publication and Conspiracy<br>interpretation of History | A Forum with Producer, Intellectual attorney and historian       | The record of forum is published<br>The Politicians questioning into Parliamentary Session |

(Source: by Author comparison and edit)

## The Second Round of Criticism on PTS Drama

On September 17, 2024, the quality press “United Daily News” published the critique by Mr. Hsu Chun-Mau regarding the script of “Three Tears in Borneo”. The owner of NUEVA VISION CO., LTD, has retired from his role as a senior journalist and has since established a business focused on publishing archives and photographs related to the Republic of China. He supported Mr. Lee Chan-ping's assertion of copyright infringement against the producers of the drama at PTS. However, he also expressed

strong criticism regarding the historical interpretation presented in the script for dramatization, as reported by UDN news.

This focus is on the Republic of China (ROC) Consul in Sarawak. The script of “Three Tears in Borneo” drew a significant conflict between the Officer (named Mr. Lo) and Taiwanese prison guards, as it questions their loyalty to the Imperial Japan Army. However, in actual history, Mr. Cho Huan-lai, the ROC Consul, never engaged in conversation with them due to his early demise from military execution.

The climax of this drama occurs at the end of episode 5, which takes place in a military court. As a member of the defense team, Mr. Lo provides his remarks regarding the nationality of the current Taiwanese prison guards. Upon receiving directives to deem Taiwanese individuals in Southeast Asia as “ordinary overseas Chinese” with Republic of China (ROC) nationality to expedite their repatriation to Taiwan for trial, Lo, seeking revenge for his wife's execution, asserted his opinion that they should still be regarded as “enemy Japanese nationals” in the Australian military court. This assertion is historically inaccurate, as noted by historians who have conducted the intensive study on the transitional period of the ROC (Shirane, 2022).

After its broadcast, pro-China and conservative groups in Taiwan expressed outrage over the wartime tragedy being distorted by public service media. PTS (Public Television Service) maintained that the talent and innovative scriptwriting should be respected in their original form. On September 12, 2024, the Press Release of PTS published for supporting the hard work and creative efforts of the production team behind this drama. The station detailed its long-term investigation and study of Taiwan's prison guards of POWs in Southeast Asia, endorsing the quality and credible dramatization of their product. Ultimately, PTS emphasized that the historical drama is not a documentary, as all characters were created fictionally and freely. Furthermore, PTS criticized comments and reviews that focused on the perceived correlation between Cho Huan-lai (China Consul) and Lo (played by Ming Shuai Shih). It is unethical to question their similarities in relation to the writer-producer and the descendants of Mr. Cho. The public service media did not welcome the exchange of differing opinions and instead directed criticism towards those who questioned the dramatization.

In response, Mr. Hsu expressed his anger and called for a rally to support legal action against PTS. Through individual donations, he planned to assist Mr. Lee in organizing a lawsuit for copyright infringement (Yoshihiko, 2024). This dispute has drawn the attention of Members of Parliament from the Nationalist Party.

By questioning the fallacy of mixing fact with fiction, Hsu provided another perspective against portraying history as drama. In this five-episode series, one of the three main characters is named ShaiKai Shion. A notable aspect of his role as a prison guard is his dedication to caring for the wife and children of the consul in the camp. He smuggled nutritious food to her by exchanging cigarettes with a local vendor. This scenario is based on historical studies of prison guards in Allied POW camps. The real individual is Ke Jingxing, who performed these good deeds (Lee, 2005; Shirane, 2022).

However, the fifth episode of the drama depicted the intense conflict when Shaikai faced the life-threatening ultimatum from the Japanese Commander to execute the wife and child of the Chinese Consul, mirroring the tragic events of the so-called Death March”.

Mr. Hsu interviewed a descendant of Ke Jinxing on December 11, 2024, to gather his perspective on the portrayal of historical events in drama. A one-hour recording revealed the resentment felt by the descendant's son regarding the blending of fiction with history, which he believes distorts his father's legacy. He requested that PTS issue a clear statement regarding this arrangement and allow Mr. Lee to clarify that reality differs from the dramatization. However, there was no response; instead, a disclaimer was added before and after the five-part episode, stating, characters in this drama have been fictionalized”.

The production team and leadership of PTS downplayed the situation, but the key members of “People History Studio” called for a united effort in a libel suit. Ultimately, the protest garnered the attention of the Nationalist Party, which resulted in political backlash against PTS.

### **Third Tide Concentrated into Political Fake on the PTS**

Long before the criticism of Three Tears in Borneo, PTS faced scrutiny from the Nationalist Party for its perceived compromise on political issues. For instance, the Taiwanese Language Channel was accused of mocking KMT politicians in a sarcastic manner, while there were concerns about unbalanced in-depth reporting on the impeachment campaign of the Keelung Mayor. Additionally, PTS was commissioned by the DPP government respectively to introduce one international channel and one 24-hour news channel.

The initial alarm regarding the conspiracy theory surrounding PTS's broadcast of this drama was raised by Mr. Hsu. He persistently questioned the integrity and

independence of PSM in its portrayal of historical events. The drama suggests a conspiracy theory that links Japan and Taiwan geopolitically while simultaneously depicting the disintegration of China.

For example, Mr. Lo, acting as the Consul of China, defied the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (ROC) and requested that the Taiwanese prison guards be classified as enemy nationals of Japan solely for his personal vendetta. In this context, the drama creates a conflict between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese individuals that never actually occurred.

In reality, one of the Taiwanese prison guards, Mr. Ke Jinxing, provided nutritional food to the wife and children of China Consul for saving their lives. After 65 years, a descendant of Cho was reunited with Ke in Taiwan to express gratitude for his actions during wartime. This encounter was facilitated by Mr. Lee Chan-ping, who witnessed the suffering of victims from both sides in the past and contributed to their reconciliation today (Loa, 2010). However, the story is recounted by Mr. Shinkai Shion, who executed them by order of the commander at the end of the war.

Mr. Hsu also referenced the producer's writing for the introduction published in PTS Friends (Sun, 2024). In the article, he clearly articulated how this production engaged with themes of history, war, and identity. To bridge the gap between history and the audience, the creators aimed to blend the script with elements of popular and mass culture to enhance its dramatic impact (see also Charland, 2007). However, they did not clearly address the fictionalization of the actors.

On November 10, 2024, Ko Chih-en, a leading KMT member of Education and Culture Subcommittee in Parliament, inquired with the Minister of Culture regarding the lack of respect for the history and reputation of the officers involved in the anti-Japanese invasion, and there has been no public response from PTS.

No later than the budget submission for FY 2025 for the PTS, backlash arose from the KMT and the ROC-supporting group. A budget cut proposal was introduced by a member of the KMT during negotiations. The proposed reduction amounts to USD 76.968 million, which constitutes 75% of the total appropriation. This represents the first significant threat to the PTS budget in its 28 years of operation. In addition to the aftermath of the Three Tears in Borneo, this proposed cut is based on four other disputes regarding PTS's operational malfunctions or political interference in its mandated services.



Although only one individual protested against PTS's drama, the majority of Parliament, represented by the Nationalist and Taiwan People's Party Coalition, ultimately processed this request by reducing the total budget for 2025 by 1%. This marks the first substantial reduction in PTS's appropriation since 1997. The timing of this reduction coincides with the lifting of the minimum budget established by the national government, following an amendment to the PTS Act in May 2023. Once the budget amount is set by the Ministry of Culture, it can be examined and adjusted by Parliament without limitation.

The fallout from this conflict extends beyond public service media to political actors as well. Led criticized this situation, resulting in budget cuts. Ms. Chen, Yu-Jen, PM of the Nationalist Party, has been singled out for her stance on creative drama by a dissenting group composed of local producers and directors. A futile debate has erupted in front of Parliament Hall, with demonstrations from both sides. Without engaging in constructive dialogue, she labeled them as “beggars for cultural subsidy.” Consequently, the group continues to mock her background and speeches in Parliament.

Chen also cited her colleague, Ko Chih-en, regarding her inquiries to the Ministers in November 2024 as the proof to issue the budget cuts to PTS. This has sparked backlash from local politicians against Ko, particularly in light of the upcoming local mayoral election in which she is a candidate. This situation exemplifies the ongoing political tensions between the ruling minority and the opposition majority.

“The Three Tears of Borneo” is a story set in the southern city of “Kaohsiung”. The drama is directed by Sun Chieh-heng, who is affiliated with Unseen Film Studio and supported by the Kaohsiung Film Fund. Under the auspices of the government-backed Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA), this project has been included in its Pavilion at the “Meet 2024 Great South”. Praised by the Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Kaohsiung City, the drama is a source of pride for the local community, particularly for the youth and the creative industry. With full support from the state, the drama has faced criticism for its ambiguous portrayal of the relationship between Taiwan and Japan, as well as the conflict involving the Republic of China (ROC) consulate and the Taiwan guard of prisoners of war (POWs).

As a countermeasure, members of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party highlighted the past actions of Ko Chih-en and organized a political campaign to attack her for what they perceived as a betrayal of her fellow citizens due to her inquiry with the Minister. The budget amendment proposal put forth by Chen has unexpectedly stirred the ongoing re-election campaign for the municipal mayor, which is now being contested



by two competing factions. DPP members are aligning themselves with the local city against the Kuomintang's (KMT) perceived affinity for Mainland China. In response to the backlash from the Nationalist Party, damage control efforts have been implemented, resulting in a slight reduction in the annual appropriation for Public Television Service.

This one-time historical drama showcased the complexities of recent political resentment following the Kuomintang's loss in the 2016 Presidential Election. The center-left Democratic Progressive Party has since governed the media and political landscape according to its ideologies and historical consciousness during this critical eight-year period, particularly after the outbreak of the special military operation in Ukraine in 2022. This local event and its associated controversies are further complicated by the dynamic structure of the historical triple alliance, which includes Cold War ally Japan and the current competitive relationship with China.

## **The PSM reaction to the Aftermath of One Historical Drama**

After the debut of the drama on linear channels and OTT platforms in August, disputes have risen to the forefront of entertainment news as of September 17, 2024.

On October 9, PTS finally and formally addressed the ongoing disputes, aside from the historical consciousness. This conference, which was non-mandatory and aimed at processing complaints, was organized by the staff of the Public Communications Department. The focus of the meeting was to exchange opinions on drama creativity and related legislative issues.

Avoiding the contentious issue of identifying with the Chinese consulate, this conference proceeded without addressing the concerns raised by audiences regarding other than intellectual property rights, which are not crucial in professional discussions. There was limited debate solely on originality and creativity in drama scriptwriting. However, the controversial aspect of this historical drama occurs in Episode 5, which depicts the courtroom exchange between the defense attorney and the military prosecution team is not well-presented. During the conference, this issue was not directly addressed; only a few general comments were made by lawyers on related topics.

1. If the historical figure did not exist during the period of the trial, the producer may create a fictional character without defaming the original figure, even if the fictional actor poorly performs their role in the plot.

2. The historical figures, upon passing away, lose their claim to the “Right to Reputation”, excepting when offspring or descendants possess the right to protect their ancestry from defamation or insult as enacted by criminal law.

3. The character created by the production should not contain any clues or elements that imply a connection to a real person from the same historical period.

The Chairperson of PTS made a remark at the end of the conference. His statement acknowledged the pain caused by the fictional portrayal of the China Consul attending the military court after the war had ended. The solution to this dispute lies in creating more opportunities for dialogue among the stakeholders involved in this drama. This formal meeting lacked the presence of the actual plaintiffs and representatives from various schools of historian on World War II. Ultimately, it provided little assistance in addressing the ongoing issues that are being fervently debated.

Shortly before the public meeting, the Chairperson of PTS commented on this drama during the 30th Board of Directors Meeting on September 20, 2025. To address the critiques regarding historical dramas and the PTS commission, guidelines for the production of dramatizations based on historical story should be established by public service media. He also acknowledged that PTS should be held accountable for the disputes between fact and fiction in this drama. Although the production is based on a fiction-oriented script, the historical drama bears responsibility for any harm or distress caused by the rearrangement of the original story. Furthermore, the implications of fictional productions should be evaluated in relation to the sentiments of fellow citizens towards historical patriots. Public Service Media (PSM) should take this remit into account as a valuable lesson learned.

In the first half of 2025, the Chairperson published his farewell report. Within the section on drama production, he dedicated several articles to revisiting this issue (Hu, 2025: 94-163). The articles in this section concluded with a review of “Tree Tears in Borneo”, on a single major dispute regarding the fictionalization of historical figures for dramatization. Here, he acknowledged that it was unintentional to romanticize the ties between Taiwan and Japan, which came at the expense of the ongoing Sino-Japanese struggle for Taiwan's sovereignty in that time. Consequently, the dispute over copyright (intellectual property rights) was entirely overshadowed by issues of nationalism and identity.

Between its broadcast and the budget screen session (August to next January), the interest of PTS has primarily focused on copyright and creativity issues. Without any public hearings regarding fictional historical figures, PTS is losing the trust of those

who support the status of the Republic of China during World War II and the bravery of the Chinese consul in North Borneo. It is reasonable to predict that the appropriateness of PTS's screenings will be heavily scrutinized by members of the Nationalist Party at the end of the fiscal year.

A conspiracy plot has been proposed by politicians. The drama revolves around the collaboration between emerging local producers from southern Taiwan and Japanese colonialists, aimed at deepening their connections. This strategy is part of the Democratic Progressive Party's efforts to assume a new role in the geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific rim. This conjecture was further substantiated by the budget proposal presented by the Kuomintang Caucus, which was slated for review during the budget screening. Several supporters of the writer-producer of this drama from the local community stepped forward to demonstrate in parliament. They engaged in a heated debate with PM Chen, Yu-Jen regarding the political implications of both actions on January 17, 2025. This situation has evolved into a familiar scenario involving the persecution by the Chinese Communist Party and the Pan-Green Camp's push for independence.

Over the course of the budget screening dispute, PTS maintained a calm and respectful approach to the budget negotiation and inquiry process. The Board of Directors also supported the position of the legislative representative who attended the parliamentary session. A compromise was reached in a very short time by agreeing to reduce only 1% of PTS's total revenue, which effectively ended the conflict. On January 21, the leading member of the KMT party in the Culture and Education Subcommittee rejected the proposal to significantly cut the budget due to concerns over accountability in historical drama production.

## **Conclusion**

This paper addresses the core argument of a drama intertwined with the ongoing struggle for identity and the historical interpretation of contemporary Taiwan. Should PSM in democratic governance serve as a solution to this complex historical hurdle? How can the independence and creativity of PSM programming be maintained when it involves the interpretation of the past and collective memory? Is it imperative for PSM to adopt a responsibility or ethical code of decolonization in order to address political criticism and debate? Has there been insufficient dialogue and communication between PSM and conservative or far-right groups, similar to the confrontations that have occurred in Europe and the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region? If this is the case,

should a common solution be sought through a pan-Euro-Asian PSM collaboration in the near future?

This research collected chronological data and documents exchanged between stakeholders and PTS regarding these issues. An example of valuing the program in remembrance of wartime history is “The Valour and the Horror”. It was broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation as a three-part television series in January 1992. Similar to the previous case studied here, “The Valour and the Horror” faced accusations of distorting the facts following its debut. In response to the complaints made afterward, the ombudsman system took over the controversy for assessment and resolution. The primary focus of the issue is whether the production overstepped the line between journalism and drama. My argument is normatively constructed along this line through the Canadian case, but with one significant difference: it overstepped the line from drama into documentary. Based on this premise, the paper has conducted a comparative review.

The significant difference between Taiwan and Canada lies in the positioning of the broadcast content under dispute. The docudrama of “the Valour and the Horror” is immediately scrutinized, followed by the news genre. Public interest in news should be prioritized and protected by Public Service Media. The CBC Ombudsman actively addresses this matter and also responds to requests from the President. However, the “Tree Tears in Borneo” is categorized as a drama and is subjected to the standard programming complaint process. Without a formal complaint, there can be no initiation of a program review. To support broadcasting copyright, the Public Communications Dept. only organized a forum focused on pro-creativity discussions, rather than a civic forum that includes all stakeholders.

The Guideline of the PTS Program (PTS, 2021) include specific standards for evaluating its drama series. Clause 4.6.2, under the section concerning stakeholders in drama production, stipulates that the inclusion of historical figures in the plot, portrayed as main characters, is permitted only with the consent of the relevant individuals. Additionally, a report must be submitted in advance and approved by the Supervisor. However, the performance should not be overly fictionalized to the extent that it distorts the true story through excessive dramatization. Furthermore, Clause 4.3.2.3, under the section on fair participation, tolerance, and mutual understanding, emphasizes the importance of proactive and positive attitudes from PTS in portraying the diversity of the social fabric. This clause promotes social dialogue to respect the differences in identities, culture, and heritage among various social groups. It affirms that public

service media plays a crucial role in shaping social image and significantly influences individual cognition.

This dispute regarding the PTS drama in this research, categorized as a fictional work celebrated for its creativity and the talent of young artists, extends beyond the scope of internal processes. The primary focus on the reinterpretation of the characters of the Chinese Consul and his wife, which blends imagination with historical study, should not be regarded as a purely fictional production. However, it did not include a pre-screening study to ensure compliance with Guideline.

Thinking internationally, the dispute surrounding historical dramas intertwined with colonialism should not be confined to a local study. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD, 2008), on behalf of the Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) serving the United Nations, published regional PSB approach directives in 2008, reflecting the course of this issue.

a. Objectives of the PSB--

Must discourage hate-preaching, distortion of national characters.....

Amplify Asian voices in the global information network. These networks, in turn, can effectively reflect Asian perspectives and experiences, while focusing more on some under-reported regions.

One should not simply be an onlooker of events and issues but rather a vital force in promoting social progress, living up to its “responsibility in the areas such as upholding justice, maintaining peace and stability.....

b. Programming, News and Production--

Programming content should ensure that it is not unduly offensive to any one community or culture;

c. Accountability—

Public Service Broadcasting may commission an independent research to assess the quality of its programming.....

PSB can adapt audit measures for public service broadcasting such as the ISAS BC 9001, covering satisfaction of viewers-listeners, quality and accuracy of information, quality and diversity of other types of programming, innovation and creativity, independence and transparency of management, promotion and respect for ethical rules, representation of national minorities, universal access and social relevance.

Formation of citizens’ media and/or community-based groups should be encouraged. This enables citizens to participate in meaningful dialogue with the PSB.....

PSB should also establish clear means through which the public can lodge complaints and suggestions.

Should supplement its legal framework with some self-imposed structures to ensure that its standards and principles are addressed effectively.

One such structure is to create an Audience Unit to handle and resolve public complaints.

An independent Complaints Review Panel should be set up by the Board to handle cases unresolved at the level of the Audience Unit.

Complaints will cover alleged violations of the Public Service Broadcasting law and regulations and noncompliance on self-regulation the industry has adopted.

PSB can be encouraged to appoint an ombudsman who will monitor violations in the programme strategy and respond to public complaints.

If we compare the AIBD's approach to accountability with the current Guideline PTS that has been adopted, there are several issues that Taiwan's Public Service Media must reconsider in light of this dispute.

1. Should the Asian value of PSM be proposed for Taiwan's media policy? Once the impetus of its rhetoric is accepted, can the concepts of colonialism and de-colonialism be integrated into PSM's program policy without question?
2. It is essential for the programming staff or department to be guided in addressing issues related to offense and instability concerning race, community, and tradition, rather than solely focusing on promoting creativity.
3. To establish an internal and independent research team to carefully address disputes arising from the program, rather than solely focusing on disputes related to news with meticulous attention.
4. Consider adopting ISAS BC 9001 or another mechanism, such as an Ombudsman, to establish a normative framework for efficiently addressing audience satisfaction. For example, the directive of BC 9001 provides guidance as follows (ISAS, 2003:24),

avoidance of one-sided reporting and programming in regard to religion, political belief, culture, race and gender,

Other than the four points mentioned above, one potential solution involves indirectly imposing Public Service Media as a form of self-regulation. To facilitate the organization of citizen and civic groups, PSM should effectively incorporate the diverse opinions generated by social groups across the political spectrum. In particular, the far-right movements currently gaining traction in Europe and the United States should not be excluded from our social democracy beliefs. According to Habermas (2022, cited by

Yang, 2024), the current platformation of mediascape created plenty of “Halboffentlichkeit” during discussions of public policy and citizenship. This emerging new public sphere is, however, constrained by the phenomenon of “echo chamber”. PSM should actively engage with these trends rather than merely observing events from the sidelines.

In reality, the local case is being processed through a citizen deliberation system by convening an open conference for all participants to clarify that this drama is entirely fictional. On the other hand, an internal review system has been implemented for all types of historical dramas in the future, learning from this accusation. Until now, this has been the only solution pursued by PTS, with little attention given to renewing its mandate.

Published in May 2025, the Liberties Rule of Law Report 2025 (Civil Liberties Union for Europe, 2025) addresses a significant issue: the decline in media freedom and governmental interference in the editorial independence of PSM. -9The survey of 21 countries revealed common challenges facing democracies within the European Union. Politically, PSM should ensure its survival by engaging with politicization rather than distancing itself from it. Additionally, a new European Media Freedom Act, enacted by the European Parliament, was introduced to counteract current governmental interventions, effective August 2025.

Another example is the public service media model in the Central and Eastern Europe region. The depoliticized governance model and reforms were successfully implemented in 2022, resulting in the revitalization of RTV Slovenia. The new 17-member Board, which includes representatives from civil society and employees, is fully responsive to the challenges faced by the RTV Management Board and is prompt in implementing enterprise reengineering measures to address the crisis. PSM should engage in dialogue with various political constituencies and reintroduce these issues into the policy-making arena.

Finally, the present moment provides an opportunity to address this concern and conduct a critical analysis of the historical positioning of public service media in Asia. The outcome should contribute to Recommendation 10: Media in Countries of Conflict and in Transitional States, as articulated in the AIBD's Declaration 2003+10”. To reflect the following policy, which states, “In order to strengthen media’s role as a means of communication between elected governments and their constituents and as a peaceful platform for communities to better understand, participate in and decide on conflict



related issues”, this research posits that a normative structure should be revised before PSM is compelled to navigate a new landscape of geopolitics and set sail.

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