

Series' cancelation highly suspect

Written by Hu Wen-hui 胡文輝
Monday, 21 May 2018 08:09

After broadcasting just two of 35 planned episodes, Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation's subsidiary Da Ai TV pulled its historical drama Jiachang's Heart (長江心) off the air, reportedly because Beijing was displeased with the show, saying it was kissing up to Japan.

Da Ai insisted that there had been no pressure from China and that the drama was canceled simply because it failed to comply with the channel's guideline of "purifying the human heart."

A handful of reasons might have compelled Da Ai TV to cancel the show.

First, the channel might have buckled under pressure from China, reflecting a toxic media environment and the hideously truculent nature of the Chinese communist regime.

Second, the channel might have canceled the show because of pressure from Beijing, but decided to keep quiet about it to cover up for China, which is even worse than the first scenario.

Third, Beijing itself might not have exerted any pressure, but delivered its criticisms through peripheral extreme media outlets and trolling netizens, and Da Ai employed self-censorship because of this. If true, this would be 10 times worse than the first two scenarios.

Finally, it is also possible that the channel canceled the show without any outside influence.

Da Ai's own explanation, that the show goes against its guideline of "purifying the human heart," is hardly credible, as the cancelation means wasting tens of millions of New Taiwan dollars, which presumably came from donations from the faithful. Also wasted was the hard work of the show's producer, director, actors, screenwriters and other staff.

Had Da Ai really wanted to "purify the human heart," and the show fell short of this, why would

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it have produced the drama in the first place, only to cancel it after just two episodes were aired?

Most media analysts find the first three scenarios more believable than the channel's own explanation, and the third scenario — self-censorship — is the most plausible.

In 1984, George Orwell encapsulated the pernicious censorship of an autocratic totalitarian dictatorship with the phrase “Big Brother is watching you.”

However, Da Ai folded far before it got to this point: It is as if the channel was ready to give up its freedom of speech, writing and publication after a mere glance from Big Brother. The shadow of totalitarian control by the Chinese Communist Party, it seems, has been internalized into the TV channel's self-censorship.

It would be every bit as unfortunate if Da Ai had folded under pressure and refrained from talking about it, as this would have concealed Beijing's pernicious nature from the general public.

Hopefully, the real reason behind the withdrawal of Jiachang's Heart was neither of these, but either way, it is up to Da Ai TV to clarify the situation.

Of course, that the Chinese communist regime should be trying to interfere in Taiwan is hardly news. It tries to control Taiwan's media through major Taiwanese businesses investing in China, recruiting those media outlets into its service as some kind of fifth column. This is far more troubling than the mere cancelation of a TV drama.

That said, the removal of Jiachang's Heart reveals Beijing's ambition, as well as one of its modus operandi in further eating away at Taiwan's sovereignty. Through the manipulation of extreme netizens and media outlets such as the Global Times, Beijing seeks to interfere with Taiwanese media outlets, control TV drama content and manipulate Taiwanese cultural identity.

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It is as if part of Taiwan's ability to govern itself and maintain its sovereignty has already fallen within China's jurisdiction.

Jiachang's Heart depicts an epoch experienced by Taiwanese, part of Taiwan's history, and yet China attempts to suppress this, accusing the drama of "kissing up to Japan," which goes against its political agenda. Beijing wants to have the right to interpret history on behalf of Taiwan and wipe away parts of Taiwan's story, prohibiting Taiwanese from relating to their own past.

Even if Da Ai folded under pressure, Taiwanese must never tolerate humiliation of this kind. Taiwanese only stand a chance if they face the threat, fully aware of what is happening.

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