

Series highlights lack of opportunity

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Saturday, 04 September 2021 00:31

The TV miniseries *Segalu: Formosa 1867* (賽加路) has been criticized for its marketing and its portrayal of some historical characters and events.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) has criticized the series for its favorable portrayal of the historical character Charles Le Gendre (played by French actor Fabio Grangeon), Taiwan News reported on Thursday last week.

Records show that Le Gendre betrayed Aborigines' trust, broke his promises and led the Japanese military in massacring Aborigines, the article said, citing Taiwanese writer and journalist Yang Du (楊渡).

The report also said that the series' name had to be changed from *The Flower of Ga Le* (賽加路) after it was revealed that “

Ga Le

” was historically a pejorative used to refer to Aborigines.

The series — based on a novel by Chen Yao-chang (陳耀昌) — uses the backdrop of a US ship's crew being killed by Aborigines after landing in Taiwan as a sort of celebration of ethnic diversity in Taiwan in the late 19th century.

Director Tsao Jui-yuan (曹瑞原) told the *Epoch Times* in March in an interview that the series was about acceptance and celebration of ethnic diversity in Taiwan. This is obvious in the casting, as aside from Grangeon and other Caucasian actors who play Americans, it includes actress Wen Chen-ling (溫陳琳) in the role of lead female character Tieh Mei (鐵梅) and Andrew Chau (周潤發) in the role of lead male character Pi Chi-lin (皮志林). Both Wen and Chau are of mixed ethnicity, as are the characters they play in the series.

However, this begs the question of who this series really represents and who it is for.

Lead actor Camake Valaule — who passed away on Aug. 19 — was a big proponent of the

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preservation of the Paiwan language and culture, and many of the criticisms levied at the series are due to its portrayal of events in Aboriginal history.

The marketing of the series also prominently features images of Grangeon. That might have been to make the series more appealing or more accessible to a foreign audience, but Grangeon is not well known outside of Taiwan.

Arguably the series is well directed, has excellent cinematography and an engaging story, but one cannot help but feel it is a missed opportunity to tell a story more from an Aboriginal perspective.

Why not tell the story of the resistance to Japanese colonization in the Wushe Incident in what is now Nantou County in 1930, or the story of the resistance to Japanese colonizers during the Nanjhuang Incident in what is now Hsinchu County in 1902?

Another option would be a narrative based on oral history passed down through the generations in an Aboriginal community.

The choice of a fictional narrative based loosely on a historical incident, and telling that narrative from an outsider's perspective, while marketing that narrative as "historical," is a bit of a stretch.

One cannot help but recall what has always been a problematic film for Disney, *Pocahontas*. It has been seen as capitalizing on what was not a proud moment in history for native Americans, while romanticizing the role of a European male in those events.

Perhaps *Seqalu: Formosa 1867* highlights a bigger issue — there is insufficient opportunity in the TV industry for Aborigines to act and direct. Perhaps more resources are needed to help bring old — and maybe soon to be forgotten — stories from Aboriginal communities to a larger audience.

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The Council of Indigenous Peoples should discuss with Aboriginal communities if there are stories they want preserved in a movie or TV miniseries, and help allocate resources to make that happen.

It should also ensure that Aborigines who want to direct and act in such projects have the means to do so.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2021/09/04](#)
