

'Fierce Wife' and representing Taiwan

April 19, 2015 by Daniel J. Bauer

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOF) recently announced the launching of our popular television sitcom "The Fierce Wife" as a type of good will ambassador for Taiwan in Latin American countries. The show has been entertaining local viewers since 2010, won a Golden Bell Award for Amanda Zhu as best supporting actress in 2011, and dazzled audiences as a movie adaptation in 2012.

The program is no stranger to Asian viewers. In its Japanese version, "The Fierce Wives" carries the title "Does Marriage Guarantee Happiness?" It is known similarly in sophisticated Singapore as "The Shrewd Wife." In Tongyong Romanization, the title is "Xi Li Ren Qi." Surely possibilities abound here for some digging in English conversation classes. I wonder how many students can use "fierce" with confidence, or are sensitive to the potentially satiric feel of "shrewd," for example. And what a topic for conversation! What, if anything, can "guarantee happiness" in life?

I am informed that the negative term I heard of as a youth, "home wrecker," known with a twist of the dagger in Taiwan life as "the other woman," or "xiao san," finds its roots in this program. The plotting reportedly deals with infidelity. I'm wanting to make a joke about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs promoting illicit romance with foreigners, but since I've never watched the show, I'd better be cautious. The Ministry, I am sure, is just doing its job, and not engaging in any tricky double entendre here.

A student from Hong Kong supplied the link to "xiao san," by the way. That makes sense, as "The Fierce Wife" is also popular over there. The same hold true for Malaysia. The MOF says the show will be made available to 10 TV networks in 8 Latin American countries. Among the lands where Latino friends will meet our fierce wife in Spanish are Chile, Paraguay, and El Salvador.

Media quoted Vice Foreign Minister Vanessa Shih as saying it is part of the mission of the MOF to "promote Taiwanese soft power and culture in the region where most of the R.O.C's diplomatic allies are situated." All of this is exceedingly interesting to me.

For starters, I approve of "Taiwanese" in the quote above. I agree with an old friend (obviously not from "the mainland") who once suggested, "If someone's

passport says 'Taiwan' on it, let's call the person 'Taiwanese'."

Also, I'd like to gently say that I understand entertainment is entertainment. Romance and, yes, sex, are powerful forces for all of us. As a Catholic priest ("shen-fu") I am bound by my vows of chastity, and so romance and, yes, sex, are not on the table for me. This is what I've chosen, and I am grateful for my many blessings. But life is life, and romance and sex do have their lighter and even humorous edges. Let's not get too bothered over television with a few racy turns of plot.

As for me, well, I am comfortable with most of the so called "traditional values." I believe strongly in marriage, and am not a happy camper with notions of people living together outside of it as a trial period before a wedding. I speak openly about my values with students and friends. I'm not in favor of affairs, either (unless they're of the MOF variety). But I see no need to judge others. Care and compassion make better sermons than frowns, scowls, and harsh words.

Still, we appear to be caught in a conundrum. "The Fierce Wife," built on the idea of a man cheating on his wife, is to promote "Taiwanese culture and soft power."

I am resisting a temptation to share an anecdote about the student who once seriously said to me, "Don't worry about our English, Father. We get all our English help now from watching 'Sex and the City.'" So much, ha ha, for my high regard for American (romantic) culture and soft power. "Sex and the what?"

"The Fierce Wife" aside, how can Taiwan best promote itself? The answer is to share our people and our individual characters. The answer is to let others see us. The way we act as tourists on planes, and behave in hotels and restaurants says so much about Taiwan. The best of our ambassadors do not work for the MOF or have a fig to do with a TV show. Our best ambassadors are Taiwanese citizens working in the arts, business and education, and our students in schools all over the world.

That idea is something worth thinking more about. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points

- 1) The Taiwan government has arranged for the popular TV show "Fierce Wife" to be translated into Spanish and shown on TV in 10 Latin American countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hopes this will help people learn about Taiwan. Do you think "Fierce Wife," a partly humorous weekly drama, can represent Taiwan well?
- 2) "Fierce Wife" is partly based on the subject of marital infidelity. In other words, these TV shows are about family life in Taiwan that may be broken by love affairs which involve "xiao san," "the other wife." Is this a fairly common marriage problem in Taiwan? What ARE some typical marriage problems in Taiwan?
- 3) The author ends by saying the "best representatives" for Taiwan are students who study in foreign lands and Taiwan tourists, whose manners and behavior make Taiwan look good. Do you agree?

**本文章僅供讀書會參考使用，非經原作者同意，請勿任意轉載。

師生互動與社會關懷
專欄讀書會