

Mask kerfuffle reveals demons

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Tuesday, 04 February 2020 06:10

There have been a host of incidents involving Taiwanese celebrities making comments that have been perceived as attempts to ingratiate themselves with the Chinese market, but never has an incident sparked outrage as much as the one last week surrounding singer Christine Fan (范曉萱). She used a barrage of derogatory epithets to describe Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) after the government banned exports of surgical masks for a month amid fears of a local 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak.

Unlike Taiwanese K-pop idol Chou Tzu-yu (周子瑜), who was forced to apologize for briefly waving a Republic of China flag in an episode of a variety show, Fan's Facebook post was completely spontaneous, which led many to question her intentions.

Although Fan deleted the post and apologized, saying that she had only hoped that people would treat one another with more love and kindness, her attempt at damage control backfired when more than 170,000 Facebook users responded to her apology with the "angry" reaction.

Fan portrayed herself as a humanitarian, yet when confronted by a person online asking her why she had remained silent when the Hong Kong government was brutally cracking down on people protesting an extradition bill, she said that the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong are a "political incident and beyond her power to comment on."

This response prompted many to question whether she has forgotten her politically charged assault on Su and whether she considers protesting Hong Kongers to be human — also in need of love and kindness.

The controversy raged on when actress Big S (S, also known as Barbie Hsu, 徐熙媛) and her younger sister, TV show host Little S (S, also known as Dee Hsu, 徐熙娣), joined the fray. Barbie Hsu's husband, Chinese millionaire Wang Xiaofei (王 Xiaofei), on Thursday last week announced on China's Sina Weibo microblogging site that he had purchased 10,000 surgical masks in Taiwan and would ship them to Wuhan, China, where the virus purportedly originated.

Wang later said that he would give the masks to people in Taiwan instead, as he was not allowed to export them to China, while Dee Hsu shared Wang's Sina Weibo post and said: "It is

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against human nature not to help one another... Hatred is more dreadful than viruses.”

However, when the WHO, succumbing to Beijing’s pressure, left Taiwan out of emergency meetings on the prevention of 2019-nCoV, creating a breach in disease prevention efforts, the righteous words of Fan and Dee Hsu were nowhere to be heard.

As such, it was perfectly understandable that Dee Hsu’s swipe at the government and Fan’s apology failed to strike a chord. Ultimately, their hypocrisy proved too much for most Taiwanese.

To add to the absurdity of Fan and Dee Hsu chastising the government for issuing an export ban on masks, news channel TVBS last week reported that China manufactures 10 times as many masks as Taiwan, and that the nation imports about 400 million masks from China annually.

Su’s announcement of the export ban does not make him a “dog of a bureaucrat” — it was the only sensible thing to do and a timely judgement call as the virus spread across China and the world. If any other country were in such proximity to China and ran such a high risk from the virus, its government would also ensure that its people had prioritized access to masks.

At a time when China is threatening to diminish Taiwan’s international space and assimilate Taiwanese, 2019-nCoV has served as a demon-revealing mirror, only this time, the demons revealed themselves.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/02/04](#)