

Enough with Aboriginal discrimination

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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It is sad that there seems to be no end to societal discrimination against the nation's Aborigines, despite numerous widely publicized incidents in the past few months that have sparked discussion.

The most recent happened when Pangoyod, a Tao actor and TV host, and Buya, an Atayal, wore their traditional attire when accepting their awards at Saturday's Golden Bell Awards. The local Chinese-language media jumped on their outfits — especially Pangoyod's loincloth, using culturally disrespectful terms such as “extremely revealing,” “baring his entire ass,” and “the hottest/sexiest outfit on stage.” Some of the comments on the event's livestream were even more brutal, and need not be reproduced here.

After centuries of colonization and cultural suppression of his people, Pangoyod wore his outfit with pride, saying: “I never dared to imagine being able to wear my ethnic attire [on stage] before.”

“No, we need to be confident,” Buya added. “We should be able to do so because we Aborigines are part of Taiwan.”

Decades have passed since the Aboriginal awakening movements of the 1980s, yet it is telling that even today the two young men still have to discuss daring to wear the costumes of their people loudly and proudly.

Unfortunately, the truth is that as much as Taiwan likes to tout its diversity and inclusiveness, its own people still feel reservations toward wearing their traditional attire on national television.

Presidential Office spokeswoman Kolas Yotaka, an Amis, said that not even adult Aborigines would have the courage to wear the attire.

People should pause and ask themselves why this is still the case, while they no longer bat an eye at some of the more eye-catching fashionistas roaming the trendy streets of Taipei.

The uncouth headlines further trampled on what was supposed to be a touching moment of embracing cultural diversity and declaring pride toward a once-oppressed identity, prompting even Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) to denounce the comments as “inappropriate” and “impolite.”

Just last month a contractor decided that Paiwan totems depicting men and women with their lower bodies uncovered were “vulgar” and covered them with colorful skirts without informing the creator or the community they belonged to — and the skirts do not even remotely resemble traditional Paiwan attire.

Incidents involving such cultural insensitivity and bias have been happening too frequently, and the offenders too often do not own up to their mistakes and fail to help educate the public that what they did was wrong.

When National Chengchi University president Kuo Ming-cheng (顧清池) made offensive comments about Aborigines last month, he tried to defend his comments in an apology instead of owning up to them and helping raise awareness of the problem.

Neither did Luo Hsiao-yun (羅淑媛), chairwoman of the Golden Bell Awards’ judge panel, directly address her error when she last month made insulting “hoh hoh hoh” sounds while revealing the Aboriginal Alian Radio as one of the nominees before asking Aborigines in the audience if they should also be making such sounds.

Luo resigned from the panel, but her “apology” issued through the Golden Bell Facebook page followed a similar vein by claiming that she did not mean to offend and tried to explain her actions.

How hard could it be to apologize and explain why the actions were offensive?

There has not been any statement from the media that published insensitive headlines about

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Pangoyod and Buya. If there is only a backlash and no discussion, people will continue to make these mistakes and claim ignorance, and nothing will change.

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