

The case against political fandom

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 18 June 2020 05:29

Now that former Kaohsiung mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) has been recalled, will the worrying trend that he rode to his initial electoral success — political fandom — disappear?

The past two years saw the emergence of the “Han fans,” a group of staunch supporters cleaving more to Han than to the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT).

For them, Han organized huge rallies outside of Kaohsiung, even before he was nominated last year as the KMT’s presidential candidate. He and his fans fed off each other, and his image grew to something vastly more inflated than the hapless Han could live up to.

He plummeted to the ground like a modern-day Icarus, but his core supporters are the reason Han has become so troublesome for the KMT leadership, initially to former KMT chairman Wu Den-yih (吳敦義) and now to KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang (蔣經國).

Neither was prepared for voters being so overwhelmingly wedded to an individual politician rather than to the party and its platform — and neither had any idea how to deal with this new phenomenon.

Wu resigned after deferring the presidential nomination to a political neophyte and untested populist, while he settled for a place on the party’s

legislator-at-large list. Subsequently, Chiang was forced to protect Han, whose supporters would like to see him steal the chairmanship at the nearest opportunity.

On the side, Vice President William Lai (賴清德) also had staunch followers prior to the Democratic Progressive Party presidential election primaries. After he lost to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), he did nothing to encourage divisions, putting the good of the party before himself.

The case against political fandom

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 18 June 2020 05:29

Former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) had charisma to bolster his political credentials. His inner circle enabled him to win battles within the KMT, but in public, Ma always represented the party first. However, his brand and charisma only went so far and his popularity ratings remained low for much of his time in office.

In the end, his political fortunes sank along with the party, when the electorate became suspicious of his pro-China policies.

Han also promoted pro-China policies, but he presented himself entirely differently. To his followers, he was a maverick and his popularity obliged the party, hijacked by the “Han fans,” to fall in line.

How has Taiwan come to this point, where personality cults manufactured around individual politicians trump political parties?

So-called “retribution” recalls have already been mooted, although neither Han nor the KMT leadership back the idea, which has been driven by Han’s core supporters.

On Saturday last week, a rally to protest the recall was held in Taipei, drawing about 500 people, few of whom were from Kaohsiung, and most of whom were in their 50s and 60s. Again, these were mostly Han supporters, although Han had discouraged them from attending, and the KMT leadership, again, kept their distance.

The Han fans seem to have taken on a life of their own. The demographic of the crowd and the speeches suggested that the rally attracted a generation whose political ideals have been left behind by the nation’s majority.

The question is, have those who still believe that the overall good of a party is more important than individual demagoguery also been left behind?

The case against political fandom

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 18 June 2020 05:29

Is this phenomenon a sign of the times, or could it be a mere worrying trend that will come to an end with Han's probable political demise?

Fandom in the arts, entertainment and sports engages people on a personal level. It is OK for the object of unquestioning adoration to be more idol than reality. The same cannot be said for political fandom, as politicians greatly affect the future of the nation.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2020/06/18](#)