

TPP looking like a pan-blue Trojan Horse

Written by Chin Heng-wei 陳恆偉
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Will the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) replace the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) as Taiwan's second-largest political party? The issue has attracted much attention.

Let us begin with a news story. Chu Che-cheng (朱哲成), a TPP legislative candidate in 2019, announced his withdrawal from the party late last month, saying that it is full of aging politicians from the pan-blue camp, "second-generation politicians" and members of former Kaohsiung mayor Han Kuo-yu's (韓國瑜) clan.

"Where have all the pro-local members gone?" he asked.

That Chu left the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) for the TPP just to leave it again provides an insight into the transformation of TPP Chairman and Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲).

After Ko appointed Han supporter Hsieh Li-kung (謝立雄) as TPP secretary-general, people began to suspect that Ko's strategy was to ride the "Han wave." Later, this suspicion was confirmed with the recruitment of Han supporter Huang Wen-tsai (黃文泰) as director of media at TPP headquarters.

The party said that Huang was recruited because of his experience working with the media, but his employment adds weight to Chu's accusation that the TPP is filled with old, pan-blue politicians and the Han clan.

Ko has also repeatedly expressed goodwill toward the KMT.

Not long ago, Ko visited KMT Institute of Revolutionary Practice director Lo Chih-chiang (羅智強) while he was staging a protest on Taipei's Ketagalan Boulevard. Not only did Ko present Lo with a pair of blue-and-white flip-flops to symbolize the cooperation between the pan-blue and white camps, but he also appeared on Lo's live Internet program.

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During the administration of former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), Lo served as deputy secretary-general of the Presidential Office. By presenting Lo with flip-flops, Ko was clearly trying to curry favor with pan-blue camp supporters, and hint that the KMT and TPP are “brothers in arms.”

During six years of partnership and cooperation, Ko was elected Taipei mayor in 2014 with the help of the DPP.

However, soon after he was re-elected in 2018, the two sides turned from friends into foes. As Ko is no longer able to attract more votes from the pan-green camp, he must find another means of garnering support.

When the KMT quickly lost momentum after the Han wave faded away, Ko seized the chance to capture its votes.

If the TPP wants to keep growing, it needs to swallow the KMT bit by bit, and currying favor with Han supporters seems to be the quickest way.

Opinion polls conducted by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation show that the KMT and TPP are competing with each other for second spot in public support, and the TPP makes a better impression on voters than the KMT.

Founded in 2019, the TPP is still young and fresh compared with the century-old KMT. While the former is likely to grow, the latter is in free fall.

Will the TPP swallow the KMT? The possibility cannot be ruled out.

Intriguingly, ahead of a referendum later this month — for which the KMT urges “yes” votes on

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all four questions — the TPP reportedly invited its members to cast a straw poll, and the majority of them also supported “yes” votes on the items, which forced the party leadership to conduct a U-turn.

Some media commentators believe this shows that the TPP is turning “blue.”

Awash with Han staffers and former KMT members, the TPP appears to be a modern version of the Trojan Horse in ancient Greek mythology.

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Translated by Eddy Chang

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