

**THE HAN KUO-YU PHENOMENON IN
TAIWAN: INTERPRETATIONS OF THE
DEMOCRATIC PROGRESSIVE PARTY
AND THE IMPLICATIONS**

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Executive Summary

1. Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) suffered a major defeat in the 2018 municipal election. The loss of Kaohsiung city mayor seat to the major opposition party Kuomintang (KMT, the Nationalist Party) was attributed to the unexpected rise of KMT candidate Han Kuo-yu.
2. The Tsai Ing-wen government and DPP's reflection of the election outcome focused on the failure of policy performance and miscommunication between government and society. The Han wave (a term used to describe the consistently rising popularity of Han in the post-election period) was deemed to be catalysed by foreign intervention.
3. The DPP perceives Han and his narratives prioritising economic growth and conceding to the 92 Consensus as rivalling democracy and is a hazard to DPP's continuing efforts to push for reforms. The naming of a competitor as a rival to Taiwan's democracy is a frequent tactic of the DPP in crisis.
4. In the legislator by-elections held on 16 March 2019, DPP managed to gain back some electoral support when it took two of the four seats, ahead of the two seats taken by KMT and independent candidates. However, the threat of the Han wave, particularly, for the 15th Presidential Election scheduled in January 2020 was real.
5. DPP views Han as the major rival, while disregarding its traditional long-term competitor KMT. This implies certain fundamental transformation in party politics in Taiwan. Despite Han's consistently surging popularity, the relation between Han and KMT remains intriguing.
6. As DPP re-projects itself as the guardian of Taiwan's democracy, this collaterally implies that Han and those embracing economic growth narratives and conceding to the 92 Consensus would be considered local collaborators to growing Chinese influence in Taiwan.

7. Taiwanese tycoon Terry Gou announced on 17 April 2019 of his intention to run for KMT's presidential nomination. However, KMT members and pan-blue supporters still favour Han to run the presidential election for KMT.
8. The enthusiasm towards Han could be viewed as the growing public aspiration to competent political leadership. This is a long-existing phenomenon which has begun since the early democratisation period in the 1990s.
9. The Han wave and Gou's decision are feeding Taiwanese aspirations for competent leadership to solve the conundrum confronting Taiwan. Those who are able to read the electorate's multidimensional demands could lead Taiwan's democracy consolidation efforts.