

# Has The #MeToo Wave Passed In Taiwan?

Tuesday 12 September 2023, by [HIOE Brian](#) (Date first published: 16 August 2023).

**A short two months after a wave of #MeToo cases swept across the Taiwanese political landscape, it proves a question as to whether there have been genuine changes in social attitudes in the aftermath of these cases. Certainly, there has been no shortage of commentary on the matter, and the legislature responded by [passing amendments](#) to Taiwan's "Three Gender Equality laws." But whether there are lasting changes remains to be seen.**

In particular, the cases broke out due to the hit show [Wave Makers](#). Wave Makers focused on the issue of sexual harassment within election campaigns, with the show's protagonists being staffers of a political party that was clearly a DPP stand-in.

In the aftermath, [former DPP staffer Chen Chien-jou](#) came forward through a post on Facebook about having experienced similar to what took place in the show, in that she had been groped by a filmmaker who worked as a contractor for the DPP but was told to brush this off by her superiors. After Chen's initial post, several other female DPP staffers began to come forward about having experienced cases of sexual harassment.

As [an article in The Economist termed it](#), this was a case of "life imitating art imitating life." Namely, the scriptwriters of Wave Makers themselves had worked in the DPP or had a family background in pan-Green politics. As such, they drew from real cases of sexual harassment in Taiwanese politics as part of the source material for the show.

The DPP's response was to [quickly remove officials](#) implicated in #MeToo cases, whether this was as culprits or by instructing victims to keep quiet about cases of harassment or assault. In the meantime, the DPP honed in on cases of sexual harassment in the pan-Blue camp so that public pressure was not solely on the DPP, and issues regarding sexual harassment were not exclusively seen as an issue facing the pan-Green camp.

This seems to have eventually been successful, particularly after high-profile DPP figures such as former Sunflower Movement leader Lin Fei-fan [withdrew from elections](#) to take responsibility for the cases, even though they themselves were not directly responsible for wrongdoing, and after [cases were reported](#) in KMT presidential candidate Hou You-yi's New Taipei mayoral administration. Likewise, the #MeToo cases eventually spread to [Chinese dissident exile circles](#), as well as the media, entertainment, academic, and cultural spheres. This diffusion of cases may attest to how widespread the issue of sexual harassment and sexual assault are in Taiwanese society,

This is not the first time such issues have arisen regarding Taiwanese politics. There was widespread social discussion of cases of stalking and assault by partners after DPP legislator Kao Chia-yu [was detained and beaten](#) by her then-boyfriend, political Lin Chia-nan. The KMT, too, seized on the incident, with the term "Daluban"—comparing the DPP to the Taliban—[having been popularised](#) in the wake of the Kao Chia-yu assault controversy, to label supporters of the pan-Green camp as prone to violence in the same manner as terrorists.

With police arrests and convictions made regarding a series of Telegram groups run by YouTuber Xiao Yu that trafficked in deepfaked videos of women, one notes that the group mostly trafficked in [deep fakes of female politicians](#). The deepfake ring has been compared to South Korea's ["Nth Room" incident](#). That the incident also centered political figures perhaps indirectly points to how events that take place in the political sphere have had a central role in the discussion of sexual harassment, assault, "deepfakes," "revenge porn", and related issues in Taiwan, rather than such discussions occurring because of events in entertainment or cultural spheres, as might occur in other countries.

Nevertheless, in the wake of the #MeToo cases, conversations about the treatment of women in Taiwanese politics still take place. This seems to have particularly been the case with the campaign of former Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je, who is running as the presidential candidate of the TPP.

[A rally organised by](#) the former NPP chair Huang Kuo-chang alongside bodybuilder and streamer Holger Chen that took place on July 16<sup>th</sup> was ostensibly about affordable housing and lack of progress on judicial reform. All potential presidential candidates of the pan-Blue camp were present, including Foxconn founder Terry Gou, who has continued to play with the possibility of running for president. But KMT candidate Hou You-yi was booed at the rally, while Ko was cheered as the main act. In this sense, the rally has been interpreted as a de facto rally for Ko Wen-je and the first major campaign event of this election season.

What drew significant discussion afterwards, however, was the mainly male composition of the rally, which is thought to have attracted around 30,000. TPP legislator Lai Hsianglin, formerly a leftist labour organiser before joining Ko's mayoral administration as head of the Department of Labor, later was criticised with charges of sexism by defending the lack of female participants at the rally with the claim that [women may have been busy at home](#) taking care of children.

Ko's TPP later came under fire when [criticised by the Taoyuan Flight Attendants' Union \(TFAU\)](#) for a campaign event for Taipei legislative candidate Chang Chi-hao, a former China Airlines pilot. Specifically, the campaign event featured female dancers dressed in female flight attendant uniforms, taking place at a time when the TFAU [had begun a campaign](#) calling for an end to gendered uniform requirements on airlines. The TPP was criticised for objectifying women, but the party later doubled down on defending the event.

Ko himself has come under fire in the past for misogynistic statements, such as referring to unmarried women as a ["threat to national security"](#), stating that women [were "scary"](#) without makeup, and denigrating gynaecologists as ["making a living between women's legs."](#) Likewise, Ko had referred to former Kaohsiung mayor and democracy movement activist Chen Chu as a ["fat sow."](#)

But Ko's political persona seems to benefit from venturing off-script to make politically incorrect statements, as a result of which some have interpreted Ko as a populist or semi-populist politician. Indeed, there has been a backlash against feminism in previous years, such as [the labelling of feminism as a "buffet"](#) (自助餐)-a self-serving logic where one picks and chooses what one wants. Some of the advocates of this view have been politicians that came under fire for sexual misconduct, such as [DPP Taipei city councillor Chung Tung-yan](#), who was accused of beating his wife in 2017.

Though the July rally did not go that far, anti-feminism can itself be a political force, as perhaps best seen regionally with Yoon Suk Seul's [various political attacks](#) on feminism in South Korea. To this extent, some politicians have public personas built on a masculine, macho image, which may play a role in how their supporters perceive the recent wave of #MeToo cases. Though no comments on #MeToo were made during the July rally, the male composition of the rally may be due to Huang and Chen's machismo-oriented political personas. Otherwise, there may be a backlash against the [progressive "awakened youth"](#) that characterised the Sunflower Movement, for example, with the

view that they are overly focused on political correctness by other youth demographics that have not previously been focused on.

To this extent, there have already been some cases of individuals that have shrugged off #MeToo accusations to return to public life. This occurred concerning [a performance at the Riverside Live House](#) by Bobby Chen and the New Formosa Live Band at the Riverside Live House in Taipei, where it was noted that two of the performers had #MeToo allegations. Actor Jag Huang, who plays one of the main characters of Wave Makers, also [largely shrugged off allegations of sexual assault and infidelity](#) to continue to be in public life.

It is to be seen whether #MeToo has lasting effects, even as there has been increased discussion of “Cancel Culture” in the past few months. As has been seen with some of the rhetoric about recent controversies involving Ko and the TPP or the July rally, it is possible that #MeToo still proves to be a flash in the pan—without leading to a larger, structural shift in Taiwanese politics reassessing the role of gender and sexuality—and that the preexisting status quo reasserts itself given enough time.

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