

Protests against the Welfare Package for Chief Executives and Principal Officials

Macao's political awakening

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In recent years, a series of social protests such as the "Sunflower Student Movement" in Taiwan and the "Umbrella Movement" in Hong Kong have sparked concerns over the political atmosphere in the Greater China Region. Compared with Taiwan and Hong Kong, the people of Macao have long been considered politically apathetic, with a low level of political awareness and efficacy. When asked whether they would oppose the government if their interests had been seriously infringed, around 40% of respondents chose to remain silent, perhaps out of a desire for "social harmony," whereas 92.1% had no experience of engagement in any social movement.⁽¹⁾ It therefore came as a surprise when 20,000 people took to the streets on 25 May 2014 to protest against a bill that would have given generous benefits packages to outgoing Chief Executives (CEs) and top officials. In what was regarded as the biggest march since the 1999 handover, this exceptional scenario reveals the existence of a civic culture among the youth of Macao.

This unprecedented social force pushed the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government to drop the controversial package and marked a milestone in the civil rights movement against social injustice. However, the movement also pointed to two more fundamental issues that remain unresolved. The first is the lack of separation between the legislative and executive powers.⁽²⁾ The second is extensive self-censorship in the mainstream media, leading young people and professionals to share messages of criticism and calls for direct action through online media. In general, this march is considered to have laid the groundwork for future democratic movements.

This essay will focus on this significant social protest, reveal the challenges faced by democrats, and describe the change in political culture among the people of Macao, especially youngsters.

The welfare package

The MSAR government submitted the bill on "Welfare Package for Designated, Incumbent and Former CE's and Principal Officials" (*houren xianren ji liren xingzheng changguan ji zhuyao guanyuan de baozhang zhidu* 候任、現任及離任行政長官及主要官員的保障制度) to the Legislative Assembly (AL in Portuguese) and won general approval on 16 December 2013, and then planned to win the article-by-article vote (*xizexing biaoju* 細則性表決) for final approval on 27 May 2014.⁽³⁾

The bill proposes that former CE's should receive a monthly payment equal to 70% of their last monthly salary before leaving their position. The top nine officials should be given one-off compensation of 14% of the monthly salary of former civil servants and 30% for those originally from the private sector multiplied by the number of months they have worked for the government. In addition, the bill also provides a retroactive period until the year of 2000, which means that former CE's and top officials can also enjoy the benefits. Moreover, the bill proposes to give the CE immunity from criminal prosecution during his or her term of office.

Supporting views on the package

The government claimed this bill was essential because senior officials would be barred from taking up jobs in the private sector during the first year after leaving their principal positions.⁽⁴⁾ Supporters such as Ho Iat-seng, the president of the AL, insisted that the bill was necessary due to the need to set up a retirement protection system for principal officials.⁽⁵⁾ Chan Chak-mo, the president of the second permanent committee, claimed that criminal immunity was essential because it was impossible for the CE to go to court frequently during his or her tenure.⁽⁶⁾ Fong Chi-keong, an appointed legislator, stated that society should be more generous, and he personally wished to further enhance the compensation proportion.⁽⁷⁾ Jose Chui Sai-peng, an indirectly-elected legislator and the cousin of CE Fernando Chui Sai-on, expressed his concern that only "crazy people" or "liars" would be

1. Herbert Yee, Sheng Hua Lou, and Cheuk Wah Chan, *Aomen huaren zhengzhi wenhua zongxiang yanjiu* (Longitudinal Research on the Political Culture of Macao), Hong Kong, Joint Publishing (HK) Co. Ltd., 2011.
2. Joao Pedro Lau, "Macao Conscience announces June 8 rally outside AL," *Macao Daily Times*, 30 May 2014.
3. "Group demonstrates to back 'golden handshake' bill," *Macao Post Daily*, 26 May 2014.
4. "Macao officials giving themselves a golden handshake," *Ming Pao*, 28 May 2014.
5. "He Yicheng cheng yihui yingshi mince an suqiu" (Ho Iat-seng claims the government has responded the public), *Jornal Cheng Pou*, 28 May 2014.
6. "Erchanghui yiren juqian buchang faanyi jianshu" (One legislator rejects to sign the submission in the 2nd Permanent Committee), *Shimin Daily*, 22 May, 2014, www.shimindaily.net/v1/news/Macao/%E4%BA%8C%E5%B8%B8%E6%9C%83%E4%B8%80%E4%BA%BA%E6%8B%92%E7%B0%BD%E8%A3%9C%E5%B4%9F%E6%B3%95%E6%A1%88%E6%84%8F%E (accessed on 26 July 2014).
7. "Zengren meigui shouyou yuxiang fengguan weicheng teshou guanyuan xiangliren baozhang" (Fong Chi-keong supports the welfare package), *Jornal Cheng Pou*, 26 May 2014, www.chengpou.com.mo/mobile/m-news/?d=12160 (accessed on 26 June 2014).

attracted to the government's top positions if the compensation system was not in place.⁽⁸⁾ Chan Pou-sam, the vice-chairman of the Macao Jiangmen Communal Society (*Aomen Jiangmen tongxianghui* 澳門江門同鄉會), who organised a demonstration with 1,000 participants to support the proposal, commented that not only ordinary residents but also high-ranking officials contributed to the rapid development of Macao, so Macao should reward their diligence by improving their benefits.⁽⁹⁾

Opposing views on the package

Au Kam-san, a directly-elected legislator, condemned the introduction of this controversial bill without public consultation and by relying only on pro-government forces to pass the bill in the AL.⁽¹⁰⁾ This was inconsistent with Fernando Chui's continuous highlighting of his governing philosophy of "sunshine government" (*yangguang zhengfu* 陽光政府), which emphasised transparency and "scientific administration" (*kexue shizheng* 科學施政), including public consultation.

The opposition also claimed that the bill was "self-serving" (*zifei fangan* 自肥方案). Antonio Ng Kuok-cheong, another directly-elected legislator, alleged that Fernando Chui, the present CE and also the former Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, would immediately receive more than 6 million *patacas* if the bill was passed.⁽¹¹⁾ Furthermore, the Macao Civil Servants Association challenged this bill as giving "benefits to the top instead of front-line civil servants" (*feishang shouxia* 肥上瘦下), because only nine top officials would enjoy the benefits.⁽¹²⁾

In addition, the article granting the CE immunity from criminal charges during his or her tenure recalled painful memories of the scandal of Ao Man-long, the former Secretary for Transport and Public Works, who was jailed for taking bribes. Jose Pereira Coutinho, a directly-elected legislator, announced that immunity could not be considered an official prerequisite and would put officials above the law.⁽¹³⁾

Last but not least, it is critically important to note that the Xinhua News Agency, the state press agency of the Chinese government, published an article comparing the officials' retirement benefits in Hong Kong and Macao and asking (1) whether it was too generous for high-ranking MSAR officials to receive 10 million *patacas* after leaving office, (2) why the MSAR government did not conduct any consultation, and (3) how to handle the case of a CE who broke the law while in office.⁽¹⁴⁾ In addition, *Global Times*, a newspaper under the official *People's Daily*, released a series of articles reporting on the anger of the Macao public. The Beijing government obviously did not support the benefits package.

Actions against the package

On 25 May 2014, 20,000 citizens marched in front of the government headquarters (police put the figure at 7,000). Protesters held signs written in Chinese, English, and Portuguese with statements such as "No Shame at All," "Abuse of Power," "The Government Neglects Public Opinion," "Officials Care for Themselves," and "Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves." They also yelled, "Withdraw!" and urged the government to retract the package.⁽¹⁵⁾ Some protesters even called on the CE to step down if he failed to kill off this controversial bill.

Because of the outbreak of this massive protest, three members from both the AL and the Executive Council, Chan Meng-kam, Cheang Chi-keong, and Leonel Alberto Alves, hosted a joint press conference to announce their rec-

ommendation calling for further committee-level discussions on the bill. Florinda Chan Lai-man, the Secretary for Administration and Justice, immediately released a statement that the government supported their suggestion of re-analysis. However, the organisers emphasised that they were calling for "retraction" rather than "re-analysis."⁽¹⁶⁾

On 27 May, 7,000 people surrounded the AL at the peak of the sit-in protest (police put the number at 4,900). Finally, 31 out of 32 attending legislators (excluding the president) supported the government's proposal calling on the committee to re-examine the bill. After two days, the CE called a press conference to announce the scrapping of the contentious compensation bill.⁽¹⁷⁾ Fernando Chui further insisted that the government would advance with a new proposal "only with the people's agreement" and promised to utilise multiple channels such as the media, lectures, explanatory sessions, and reflections from the AL in order to receive feedback.⁽¹⁸⁾

Macao Conscience, led by educated young people and one of the core organisers of the march, described Chui's concession as a "small victory" in Macao for the civil rights movement, because the underlying problem with the MSAR government is the undemocratic political system itself.⁽¹⁹⁾ Following this incident, the organisation hoped that citizens would pay more attention to Macao's political system and to the fact that Macao needs universal suffrage to elect all AL members and the CE. They also organised forums and rallies to help residents understand that democracy is the ultimate key to dealing with governance issues.⁽²⁰⁾

Two critical challenges faced by democrats

Although the bill was ultimately withdrawn, the incident clearly reflected two main political challenges. Firstly, according to Jason Chao Teng-hei, one of the core members of Macao Conscience, the legislature is apparently failing to monitor the government.⁽²¹⁾ Secondly, Sulu Sou, another core member, condemned the mainstream media for being "harmonised" (*bei hexie*

8. "Thousands join sit-in against perks bill outside legislature," *Macao Post Daily*, 28 May 2014.
9. "Tuanti zhouri tashi faqi zhichi guangao baozhang fayouxing" (Association organises a demonstration to support compensation package), TDM, 24 May 2014, www.tdm.com.mo/c_news/tv_news.php?id=216998 (accessed on 2 June 2014).
10. "Wu Qu: Zhuyao guanyuan baozhang zhidu faan yao gongkai zixun" (Ng and Au: The welfare package needs open consultation), *Jornal Cheng Pou*, 5 May 2014, <http://chengpou.blogspot.hk/2014/05/05052014.html> (accessed on 26 July 2014).
11. "Cui shi zuida shouyizhe" (Chui is the biggest winner), *Jornal Cheng Pou*, 20 May 2014, http://chengpou.blogspot.hk/2014/05/20052014_20.html (accessed on 4 July 2014).
12. "Aomen xiuli yi gaoguan bei hongzi feihao choulou" (A bill on officials' welfare is criticised as self-serving), *The Sun*, 13 May 2014, http://the-sun.on.cc/cnt/news/20140513/00407_020.html (accessed on 4 July 2014).
13. "Aomen shimin fandui huomian teshou xingze" (Residents oppose the criminal immunity of CE), *Apple Daily*, 22 May 2014, <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20140522/18728366> (accessed on 3 July 2014).
14. "Aomen niding teshou ke zhongshen chi huangliang huofa zaizhi yuexin 70%" (Macao plans to offer permanent welfare), *Xinhua News*, 26 May 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/gangao/2014-05/26/c_126546180.htm (accessed on 15 August 2014).
15. "Protest against 'golden handshake' bill draws record crowd," *Macao Post Daily*, 26 May 2014.
16. Sio Tou lan, "Lawmakers propose to discuss 'golden handshake' bill again," *Macao Post Daily*, 26 May 2014.
17. "Thousands join sit-in against perks bill outside legislature," *Macao Post Daily*, 28 May 2014.
18. Grace Yu, "Chui withdraws compensation bill to 'listen to the people'," *Macao Daily Times*, 30 May 2014.
19. "Protest organizers say Chui's axing of bill 'small victory'," *Macao Post Daily*, 30 May 2014.
20. Jeffie Lam, "Macao protests force Chui to scrap perks bill," *South China Morning Post*, 30 May 2014.
21. "Rival groups petition govt over perks bill," *Macao Post Daily*, 27 May 2014.

Table 1 – Composition of the Legislative Assembly from 1999 to 2017

	1996-2001	2001-2005	2005-2009	2009-2013	2013-2017
Directly elected seats	8(1)	10(2)	12(3)	12(4)	14(4)
Indirectly elected seats	8	10	10	10	12
Appointed members	7	7	7	7	7
TOTAL	23(1)	27(2)	29(3)	29(4)	33(4)

Source: Eilo Wing Yat Yu, "Macao's 'one country, two systems': High autonomy or intervention?", in Ray Yep (ed), *Negotiating Autonomy in Greater China: Hong Kong and its Sovereign before and after 1997*, Denmark, NIAS Press, 2013, pp. 207-241.

Note: The numbers in parentheses correspond to the number of democratic legislators.

被河蟹), or censored, by the authorities. Newspapers only provided a "stamp-sized" corner for them while offering whole pages to report on dinner gatherings of pro-Beijing associations. The TV news offered only around 10 seconds to report their campaigns, but around one minute to describe the activities of pro-government organisations.⁽²²⁾

During the handover negotiation period, the Portuguese government did not insist on the democratisation of Macao due to consideration of the Chinese market.⁽²³⁾ Thus, compared with Hong Kong, the Macao Basic Law clearly reflects the Beijing government's lack of enthusiasm for promoting democratisation. According to Hong Kong Basic Law Article 45, the ultimate goal is the election of the CE by universal suffrage upon nomination by a generally representative body. However, there is no such commitment in Macao.⁽²⁴⁾ In the current tenure, the Basic Law stipulates that the CE be elected by a 400-person electoral committee, thus marginalising the general public.

Similarly, there has been no statement, as in Hong Kong, that the ultimate aim is the election of all legislators by universal suffrage (Article 68). The Macao Basic Law only states that the majority of members of the AL shall be "elected."⁽²⁵⁾ In fact, the composition of the AL is formulated through both democratic and undemocratic methods. Currently, it is formed by direct election (elected by all registered voters), indirect election (through negotiation and compromise by traditional associations), and appointment (nominated by the CE).⁽²⁶⁾ Table 1 reveals the composition and distribution of the pan-democratic camp in the AL.⁽²⁷⁾

Obviously, the AL electoral system does not favour the opposition. First, indirect elections are dominated by four constituencies: (1) business interests, (2) labour interests, (3) professional interests, and (4) charity, culture, education, and sports interests. Each registered social group coordinates and negotiates among themselves to nominate pro-government candidates. In reality, most of Macao's associations are dominated by pro-China forces, and the opposition is barred from taking part due to inadequate resources.⁽²⁸⁾ In the direct election, a proportional representation system with the new D'Hondt formula has been adopted.⁽²⁹⁾ The pro-democratic camp received around 30% of the vote and gained four out of 14 directly elected seats in 2013: Antonio Ng, Au Kam-san, Jose Pereira Coutinho, and Leong Veng-chai. More significantly, the appointment system is still maintained in order to provide stable support for the government. Under this scheme, there is no system of checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches. From 1999 to 2013, nearly all 187 of the government's motions were passed without challenge.

Secondly, the phenomenon of self-censorship is obvious in Macao's media industry. The subsidisation of all Chinese and Portuguese newspapers allows the authorities to put pressure on reporters. As a consequence, independent investigations monitoring the government are rare, and pro-Beijing views

dominate news reports.⁽³⁰⁾ For instance, during the electoral reform consultation period in 2012, a group of reporters held a "black shirt campaign" because editors only allowed articles supporting government proposals while removing comments questioning the political reform package.⁽³¹⁾

Overall, the opposition forces cannot rely on the AL and mass media to expose the misconduct of the government and promote their activities. As Sulu Sou mentioned, "when the legislature and media fail to function effectively to monitor the government, people will resort to direct action. It happens everywhere in the world."⁽³²⁾

Explaining the success of the anti-welfare package campaign: Youth-driven online activism in Macao

Existing literature has long recognised that the political opposition and civil society are weak in checking the government's performance and promoting democratic values in Macao.⁽³³⁾ Although there are five thousand social groups in Macao, almost all categorise themselves as "love China, love Macao" (*aiguo aiao* 愛國愛澳) organisations. Many of these groups are enmeshed in corresponding networks in China, and their immediate goal is to promote the political stability of Macao by legitimising government policies.

Macao Conscience was established in 2012, and most of the founding members are locally-born youngsters with a strong sense of belonging to

22. "Longtou dao zhongdian longwei wei chufa dangshi haoxianghan" (Sulu Sou: I want to cry), *Ming Pao*, 1 June 2014.
23. Shiu Hing Lo, *Political Development in Macao*, Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 1995.
24. Yash Ghai, "The Basic Law of the Special Administrative Region of Macao: Some reflections," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2000, pp. 183-198.
25. Yash Ghai, *art. cit.*, 2000.
26. Eilo Wing Yat Yu, "Executive-legislative relationships and the development of public policy," in Newman Lam and Ian Scott (eds), *Macao's Casino Capitalism: Gaming, Governance and Public Policy*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2011, pp. 57-74.
27. Eilo Wing Yat Yu, "Macao's 'one country, two systems': High autonomy or intervention?", in Ray Yep (ed), *Negotiating Autonomy in Greater China: Hong Kong and its Sovereign before and after 1997*, Denmark, NIAS Press, 2013, pp. 207-241.
28. Bill K. P. Chou, "Interest group politics in Macao after handover," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 14, No. 43, 2005, pp. 191-206.
29. Eilo Wing Yat Yu, "Macao's 'one country, two systems'," *art. cit.*, pp. 221-223.
30. Bill K. P. Chou, "Local autonomy matters: One-country two-system policy in Macao and its implications for China's policies on its borderlands," in Yufan Hao and Bill K. P. Chou (eds), *China's Policies on its Borderlands and the International Implications*, Singapore, Hackensack and NJ, World Scientific, 2011, pp. 225-252.
31. Eilo Wing Yat Yu, "Macao's 'one country, two systems'," *art. cit.*, p. 223.
32. "Liangwan ren lieri shangjie fan gaoguan zifei zibao fa'an chesheng zhentia" (20,000 people take to the street and oppose the self-serving bill), *Jornal Cheng Pou*, 26 May 2014.
33. Bill K. P. Chou, *ibid.*, 2005, pp. 191-206.; Alex H. Choi, "International relations between mainland China and the Macao SAR," in Allen Hicken (ed), *Politics of Modern Southeast Asia: Critical Issues in Modern Politics*, London and New York, Routledge, 2010, pp. 475-499.

Macao together with relatively high education levels and advanced IT knowledge. They regularly wear t-shirts and carry signs with the slogan "Saving Our Government by Ourselves" (*ziji zhengfu ziji jiu* 自己政府自己救) in their organised events. But they could only mobilise around 50 participants in their first protest against an increase in bus fares. By gaining experience, they developed their use of social networking channels to deliver their messages, train up their mobilising skills, and leverage the changing political culture among young people. This resulted in the recent campaign attracting 20,000 participants, even in a relatively conservative city such as Macao.

According to recent findings, tertiary school students in Macao put increasing emphasis on a fair and open election system rather than the "sweeteners" offered by the government.⁽³⁴⁾ Some of them are willing to engage in social movements in order to fight for a democratic system. In the previous experience of mass protests such as the annual Labour Day and Handover Day demonstrations, significant youth participation was not evident. Taiwan's "Sunflower Movement" in early 2014 and Hong Kong's "Anti-national Education Campaign" in 2012 became central references in Macao's current campaign. Sulu Sou highlighted that the experience of studying in Taiwan also taught him how to design memorable slogans and gestures, use non-violent tactics, and divide tasks into different categories such as security and first-aid services.⁽³⁵⁾ More significantly, they realised how to utilise the Internet for promotion and mobilisation when the mainstream media was "harmonised."

The Internet is undoubtedly a new platform for political discourse.⁽³⁶⁾ Sulu Sou commented that the success of the campaign should be attributed to the changing political culture of the young through the Internet. The Internet has created a platform for youngsters to criticise the government and even mobilise people to protest. In fact, the campaign calling for protest lasted only five days, and the Internet is probably the most efficient way to connect with supporters. The announcement of the campaign on Facebook attracted close to 700 Likes, and 7,000 users declared they would attend the event. Moreover, a Facebook page adorned with a picture of a pig with the slogan "Greedy officials' severance benefits are really excessive" attracted more than 1,500 Likes and was shared more than 1,100 times.⁽³⁷⁾ The supporters spontaneously shared this message, gave their own suggestions to the organisers, such as avoiding violent attacks, and invited their friends and relatives to attend as well. Some supporters even designed their own images with messages such as "Macao people save Macao" in the hopes of mobilising more participants.

Indeed, Sulu Sou noticed that most of the participants were young people and civil servants characterised as not only educated, but also, more importantly, Internet-active.⁽³⁸⁾ Many youngsters and professionals recognised the problem of self-censored media and shifted to online "alternative news" sources such as "All About Macao" (*lunjin meiti* 論盡媒體) and online newspaper such as "Macao Concealers" (*aiman ribao* 愛瞞日報) in order to access "unreported" information.⁽³⁹⁾ By doing so, new media enabled Macao Conscience to explain the controversy over the welfare package and mobilise objectors to take part in the protests.

Besides accessing information, exchange and creation of information are also significant on the Internet. Bill Chou Kwok-ping, another core member of Macao Conscience, stated that digital networks offered less powerful individuals the chance to band together, creating a favourable atmosphere to criticise official misconduct. Internet users, especially the younger generation, use online platforms to share their displeasure regarding existing social problems such as government-business collusion, the overload of mainland visitors, unaffordable flat prices, the one-sidedly gaming-driven economy,

and undemocratic political system, expressing views that are rarely presented in mainstream media.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The Internet has created a platform for users to express their viewpoints in a non-hierarchical, participatory, and inclusive way that may attract more supporters to get involved in protest activities. Users can join together to defend their rights and pressure the authorities to be more responsible and transparent.

In a relatively radical way, some opposition associations even mobilised supporters to engage in "one person, one letter campaigns" and send message bombs to the Facebook accounts of some non-directly elected legislators to encourage them to veto the bill. Some of them were forced to shut down their accounts due to the sudden message bombing attacks.⁽⁴¹⁾ As a whole, as Au Kam-san concluded, it was believable that youth utilisation of the Internet for mobilisation has become an important weapon for future civil rights movements.⁽⁴²⁾

Subsequent to this incident, Macao Conscience, Open Macao Society, and Macao Youth Dynamics formed a joint committee and launched a civil referendum from 24 to 31 August 2014 in both physical and online voting. Drawing references from Occupy Central's June poll in Hong Kong, the civil referendum asked locals (1) if they wanted universal suffrage at the next CE election, and (2) if they had confidence in the incumbent CE, Fernando Chui.⁽⁴³⁾ Overall, 8,688 residents participated, among whom 95.06% wanted universal suffrage and 89.34% said they did not trust Fernando Chui.⁽⁴⁴⁾ However, on 31 August, Fernando Chui was unsurprisingly re-elected with 95.96% of the vote in the 400-member CE Election Committee, and he further reiterated that the civil referendum was not in accordance with the Basic Law and had no legal basis at all.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The Beijing government likewise condemned the civil referendum as "illegal and invalid." During the campaign, Jason Chao and four volunteer activists were detained by the police for allegedly violating the personal data protection law, while two journalists from Macao Concealers were arrested on suspicion of illegal use of official badges, logos, and uniforms.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Overall,

34. Eilo Wing Yat Yu and Kwok Kit Tong, "Shehui bianqian yu shehui dongyuan: Aomen dazhuan xuesheng dui zhengzhi tizhi de taidu yanjiu (Social change and social mobilisation: A study of attitudes towards the political system among tertiary school students in Macao)," in Zhidong Hao (ed), *Gongmin shehui: Zhongguo daluyu gangaotai* (Civil Society: Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan), Singapore, World Scientific and Macao, University of Macao, 2012, pp. 132-139.
35. Jeffie Lam, "Democrat ready to build on public's victory in Macao," *South China Morning Post*, 2 June 2014.
36. Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard, "Introduction: New directions in Internet politics," in Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard (eds), *Routledge: Handbook of Internet Politics*, London and New York, Routledge, 2010, pp. 1-10.
37. Sautedé Eric, "What happens in Macao... doesn't stay in Macao," *Macao Daily Times*, 23 May 2014, www.macaodailytimes.com.mo/opinion/53035-kapok%3A-what-happens-in-macao%E2%80%A6-doesn%E2%80%99t-stay-in-macao.html (accessed on 26 June 2014).
38. "Fan libufa yundong qishi" (Lessons of anti-compensation package), Now TV News, 30 May 2014, <http://news.now.com/home/local/player?newsid=102346> (accessed on 31 May 2014).
39. "Cheng sheyun xuezhe zao xiaofang daya" (School suppresses the pro-movement scholars), *Apple Daily*, 30 May 2014.
40. "Shuqian renfa xunxi yiyuan bei poguan fb" (Legislators force to shut down the FB account due to the message bombing attacks), *Apple Daily*, 27 May 2014.
41. "Aomen tuanti jiankang gaoguan baozhang fa'an" (Association insists on withdrawing the welfare package), *Sing Pao*, 27 May 2014.
42. Jeffie Lam, "Perks bill placed on hold after protest," *South China Morning Post*, 27 May 2014.
43. Stuart Lau, "Macao police halt poll 'referendum'," *South China Morning Post*, 25 August 2014.
44. Jeffie Lam, "90 pc don't trust Macao leader, says 'referendum'," *South China Morning Post*, 3 September 2014.
45. "Re-elected CE vows not to disappoint public, Chui garners 95.96 percentage of votes," *Macao Post Daily*, 1 September 2014.
46. "Police take in 5 'referendum' activists for questioning, government says poll violates personal data protection law," *Macao Post Daily*, 25 August 2014; "Activist accuses police of 'politically motivated' arrests," *Macao Post Daily*, 1 September 2014.

the position of the Beijing government is quite clear: it tolerated the protests against the welfare package, but when protesters' demands shifted to more general terms of democratic reform, the events were harshly condemned and suppressed. This "red line" was adopted not only in Hong Kong, which recently has been holding "occupy movements" to fight for democracy, but also in Macao, even with a large pro-Beijing population.

Conclusion

The MSAR government introduced a bill for a welfare package for outgoing CEs and top officials. However, as it was drafted without consulting the public, the government attracted criticism for its lack of transparency. Worse still, the perks bill was considered to grant excessively generous benefits to the CE and other top officials, as well as granting immunity from criminal charges during the CE's tenure. Criticism of self-serving motivations drew 20,000 citizens to the streets on 25 May 2014 demanding that the bill be withdrawn, setting a record for the largest demonstration since Macao's handover. The unprecedented forces successfully persuaded the government to drop the bill and alerted it to the public's awareness of political affairs. Overall, this incident weakened not only the legitimacy of the MSAR, but also the merit of Fernando Chui's re-election. Although Chui was unsurprisingly re-elected with 95.96% of the vote on 31 August 2014, this further exposed the problems of an undemocratic system. The discussion in this paper sheds light on the significant social movement that has grown out of this context of disillusionment.

As the mainstream media are criticised for performing self-censorship, some people, especially young people and professionals, have shifted to reading "online media." With a platform to share and criticise the government's performance, which is not regularly monitored in the mainstream

media, the political culture has changed. Young people brought up in a relatively affluent and educated society have developed a strong sense of political conscience and rising demands for democratic government in Macao. According to recent findings, tertiary students in Macao attach great importance to a fair and open electoral system, and some are willing to engage in social movements to fight for what they want.⁽⁴⁷⁾

However, the Beijing government's "red line" is clearly drawn. The Beijing government tolerated protests related to non-democratic issues such as the welfare package, but when the nature of the demands shifted to democratic reforms, the events were rapidly condemned and even suppressed. This strategy was adopted not only in Hong Kong, but also in Macao.

Based on the experience of Hong Kong, it must be acknowledged that fighting China for democracy is a formidably difficult task. Even so, pro-democracy groups such as Macao Conscience are still committed to sustaining their work of exposing the limitations of the current political system, strengthening online campaigns, and highlighting the importance of democracy by organising various activities.⁽⁴⁸⁾ This resulted in their civil referendum asking local residents their views on universal suffrage and confidence in Fernando Chui. Ultimately, around 8,700 residents participated. Some optimists view the recent campaigns as a political awakening, as the people of Macao are no longer compliant, but Macao Conscience is convinced that building a sense of democracy is a long-term process. In the organisation's opinion, Macao's fight can only be regarded as a "full victory" when real democracy is born.

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47. Eilo Wing Yat Yu and Kwok Kit Tong, "Shehui bianqian yu shehui dongyuan," *art. cit.*, 2012, p. 132.

48. Jeffir Lam, "Macao protests force Chui to scrap perks bill," *South China Morning Post*, 30 May 2014.