

UNDERCOVER IN HONG KONG: BEHIND BLACKSHIRT LINES

Why are so many young Hong Kongers so angry? Why do they hate China so much -- despite HK under Beijing's sovereignty being visibly freer and more democratic than it ever was under the British? What makes their frontline rioters so violent, in zombie-like fashion? What really motivates them?

The following account is circulating in various online platforms. It is purportedly by someone who joined the blackshirts for two months and observed them close-up. The observations seem to tally with other assessments, direct and indirect.

After two months of undercover contact, I was able to fathom some of the blackshirts' thinking. It had been hard for me to gain admission into their ranks and get accepted. But after shouting some slogans with them and badmouthing the government, I passed the test and became a blackshirt. Even so, I discovered surprising things after I began to understand the mentality of the rioters.

Most of the young blackshirts look moderate, with some sporting innocent smiles. How could such people have mustered the courage to play the dangerous adult sport of street rioting? It turns out that the blackshirts have a great need to be recognized by others. Without the riots, they wouldn't have made one another's acquaintance. They would have spent their adolescence as home-bound boys and girls. Working long hours, their parents neglected family communication. But after joining the rioters' corps, these homely youngsters received much "peer" recognition.

Their extreme need for such approval isn't something the pro-establishment camp understands. Having passed their youth, establishmentarians carefully weigh consequences before taking action.

As for the kids, they encourage and care for each other. The guys soon become comrades in arms, while guys and girls become lovers. Some young women offer themselves freely, especially to those who fought the police so valiantly on the front lines. Previously girl-shy young men now find themselves embraced, even by well-born, well-to-do women they wouldn't have dreamed of approaching. Fame, sex and peer recognition are powerful spurs to ever more heroic exertions on the battlefield. At the start of each riot, groups of three to five pep-talk one another. Core members can enjoy "drug treatment." Organizers hand out drugs said to numb the nerves, the better to withstand blows from police batons.

I often ask them about their political goals. But apart from shouting slogans about the "five demands" and other issues, they seldom discuss political issues. This applies even to their iconic "double universal suffrage" (chief executive and legislature) and "anti-extradition to China." At first I thought it strange: blackshirts who are sacrificing themselves to politics being reluctant to discuss politics. Rather, their conversations most often center on racist comments about new immigrants and other Chinese mainlanders. For example, their supposedly uncivilized behavior, and how the newcomers "robbed" local resources.

Only after nearly two months' association with the blackshirts did I grasp a second reason for their rioting. They want recognition from the world at large.

They believe that Hong Kong people be differentiate themselves from Chinese mainlanders. They are especially concerned about how the world views Hong Kongers. They do not wish to be "degraded" by others within a single sovereign framework. It may sound ridiculous, but underlying these kids' drive for Hong Kong independence is a deep concern about ... face. Of course, the fuse must be lit for the explosive to go off. And the extradition bill provided the fuse that was lit by the instigators behind the scenes.

Sadly, in raising the stakes so high, these face-conscious youngsters were lethally abetted by the rise of social-media platforms. On Facebook is so much distortion and incitement to hatred against the Chinese people, as well as endless disinformation. Well-known anti-China writers unconscionably spread their black propaganda. This generation of young Hong Kongers has been hard-brainwashed to become Nazis. Such notions as compassion and diversity are swept aside. Their hearts are full of hatred, the kind that breaches the bottom lines of human nature. If these brainwashed youngsters had the power to wage war against the Chinese mainland, they would kill unblinkingly, like the Japanese aggressors of old.

I came across another "coincidence" about the blackshirt rioters. Many of their frontline warriors were surnamed Nguyen. It's well known that there are hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and their descendants in Hong Kong. Formerly from anti-communist South Vietnam, they had come to Hong Kong as refugees in the late 1970s. Nguyen is a common Vietnamese surname. As it happened, the first to clamor for "Hong Kong independence" had come from their ranks. They indeed were not Chinese. Together with other politically motivated China-haters, these Vietnamese scions helped cover online platforms with anti-Chinese postings in Chinese and English. Of course, it's too much to expect their youthful audiences to spend time verifying the materials. The latter simply got on the bandwagon and joined in the China hatefest. They came to regard themselves as Hong Kongers (Hong Kongese) and not Hong Kong Chinese.

It dawned on me that the biggest spark for war is not political disputes but racial or ethnic hatred. Hitler incited the Germans to hate the Jews, then rose to power in Germany and waged war against Europe. The Japanese labeled the Chinese the "Sick Man of East Asia" to launch aggression against China. Trump incited racial hatred and successfully became president of the United States. Conflicts too have been fueled in Europe, the Middle East and Africa by the incitement of ethnic animosities. Seizing on this point, anti-China forces in Hong Kong have incessantly demonized and incited hatred towards the Chinese among local youth for their own political ends.

My hearts sinks further with every paragraph I write. Political disputes can be resolved through the search for common ground. But ethnic hatred is hard to eradicate, as it's like poison seeping into the brain. Only when the disease is identified can proper medicine be prescribed. I have glimpsed the affliction, but have no idea what the right medicine is. I hope we can work together to find a cure for the hatred infecting our young people, before it is too late.

(Translation by THWP)