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A Beautiful China

Fifteen

On Nonviolence

Part Two

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Nonviolence and Violence

Violence was necessary to overcome the Nazis. Violence is necessary to stop a maniac who is in the process of killing people. Law and order are necessary in a civilized country. But nonviolence is a belief. If there is a stronger violence rooted in fear and hatred, it can only bring more people into servitude, not freedom. The Soviet Union stopped Hitler but enslaved half of Europe.

The most powerful violence of humankind — that administered by law — has been rooted in the love of God. Law is necessary, but civilized law is about redemption, not revenge. The less fear and hatred there is, the less violence there will be. Civilization continues to progress in the direction of more and more love.

It is inevitable that isolated events of extreme violence will occur when a society is in transition. When there is extreme inequality of power, people make bigger sacrifices. We understand anger and despair, and we respect the sacrifice of individuals. It disrupts the numbness that can affect society and contrasts with the peaceful rationality of nonviolence, making it a natural complement to nonviolent social movements. Those who resort to nonviolence and those who resort to violence do not blame or sever ties with each other.

Nonviolent coercion is when a nonviolent movement has gained significant momentum and successfully deterred the threat of violent repression. Those in power are compelled to change when they realize they are no longer able to use it. This is nonviolence in action. When a social movement has achieved great momentum, it becomes even more necessary to advocate nonviolence.

Nonviolent intervention is, for example, when a group of people engage in a peaceful sit-in protest to block the advance of security forces or occupy a public square. It is not a form of attack or a struggle over control. It's about holding firm. Above all, the heart must be filled with love, not hostility.

It is possible that there will be spontaneous quasi-violence on the fringes of nonviolence. For example, there may be violent actions such as storming and occupying a radio station or a legislative chamber. However, these do not result in serious injury to people or intentional destruction of property. It is a spontaneous action of a social movement that has reached a certain stage of development. Quasi-violent acts are occasionally unavoidable, and they are also conditional on the understanding and respect of the community at large.

Violence and quasi-violence must have ethical underpinnings. First and foremost, any violence or quasi-violence must be motivated by legitimate goals. These could be freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, as well as the advancement of a better China. Second, the defense must be appropriate. Violence must be based on self-defense and be proportionate with the level of violence of the other party. Violence must never target innocent people. Break down barriers, but do not destroy unrelated property on purpose. Nonviolent social movements respect violence that is morally bound and reject violence that has no such limits.

Non-Cooperation and Cooperation

In the fight against dictatorship, non-cooperation is an essential form of resistance. Power depends on obedience. If enough citizens disobey, the regime cannot function.

There are many ways to be non-cooperative. For example, students may go on strike to resist police violence, ideological indoctrination, or incompetent administrators on campus. Taxi drivers have also gone on strike to resist deductions from their income by management, exorbitant share fees, and high gasoline prices. Netizens have united in protests to resist internet regulation, and citizens have refused to vote to resist unfree and unfair elections. Citizens refuse to allow arbitrary cell phone checks at subway stations. Websites resist censorship of online speech through their passivity. Civil servants, police officers, and military personnel have openly defied or passively resisted unjust orders. There are many more examples like these.

It is wrong to call nonviolent civic movements “non-cooperation movements.” Sometimes, cooperation must be considered.

There are numerous differences between post-totalitarian China and British-ruled India. When a populous country is being ruled by a small number of foreigners, non-cooperation is enough to paralyze their rule. But the autocrats we are dealing with are also Chinese, and we are not going to expel 80 million Communist Party members from China.

An important principle of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement was its refusal to identify with modern civilization. This belief led to the conviction that India needed to retreat to the great countryside and transcend modern civilization. This had a profound effect on India's economic development in the following decades. In today's China, it is simply unrealistic to reverse people's ideas about material consumption and advocate that kind of asceticism.

In the post-totalitarian era, you see propaganda everywhere promoting "core socialist values." Nominally, we have the right to vote. Faced with a system of hidden rules, one option is to boycott and not go to the polls. The other option is to say: "Give me democracy, I want it, I really want it! I'm going to run for office, call on people to take their votes seriously, mobilize our enthusiasm for democracy, and turn the fake into the real." Taking rights seriously and actively fighting for them is more powerful and more likely to rouse the public than passive boycotts.

When citizens defend their rights through institutions and existing laws, and by taking the law seriously, the public can participate without fear. Post-totalitarianism permeates every corner of Chinese society. Our daily use of currency, transportation, food, clothing, and shelter are all tied to the system. Total non-cooperation is simply not an option.

We don't make rigid distinctions between those inside and outside the establishment. This is a movement based on conscience. There are Chinese people both inside and outside the establishment, and each of them has a conscience. A better future is only possible if we awaken the national conscience, promote the goodness of human nature, and suppress the evil of tyranny. The individual must never be treated as our enemy. They must be treated as fellow human beings who can be recruited to the cause.

The defense of citizens' rights involves actions both within and outside the establishment. Equal access to education is primarily a demand for institutional action. Suing the municipal government for inaction, requesting access to information, setting up appointments to see your "people's representatives," and holding seminars are all considered to be actions engaging the establishment. Monthly collection of signatures and presentation of petitions are semi-institutional. The democratic political movement is dominated by actions outside the establishment.

The core of the citizen's movement is to be a true citizen and to take citizenship, rights and responsibilities seriously. We exercise our rights and serve the community which includes both non-cooperation and active struggle for rights.

The Laws of Nonviolent Movements

The Law of True Love. Nonviolent activists are an energy field, radiating love from the inside out. That love extends to every Chinese person, to humanity, and to all living beings.

We are not hateful and hostile even if our opponents are. We are not fearful and anxious losers. We represent the future, the winners in the long course of history. They are the ones who will be the losers in this great era.

We love our family and friends. We love strangers and even evil people. China has millions of people like the bare-chested, chain-wielding man at the door of the hotel being used as a “black jail.” They’re the ones who carry out forced housing demolitions, intercept petitioners, and arrest righteous citizens. And they include those who call the shots behind the scenes. We must love them as human beings who have weaknesses, who shed tears, and who have a desire for light and beauty.

This is true love. We’re not fooling ourselves. It’s not cowardice or begging. A truly strong person has an overwhelming brightness inside them.

Love enables us to endure patiently and bear our sufferings. Love enables us to live lives of truth and integrity, free from the need to keep an account of others’ sins. Love empowers us to remain true to our consciences and feel compassion for all living beings. With love, we can overcome fear and move boldly forward.

The Law of Nonviolence. We refuse to use violence and completely renounce the violent impulses deep inside our hearts.

We do not attack others. We don’t throw stones, slap people, or engage in physical confrontation. We don’t get angry or fight back when attacked. We don’t destroy property or smash things to vent anger. Anger is unacceptable. To feel anger is to fail.

We do not engage in verbal violence. We must confront earthly evil with a humble heart before God. Criticism is useless. A confrontation is not the time for criticism. Cursing is also useless because it just provokes the other person. We don’t denounce others or call them dogs. We don’t mock or ridicule. It is far better to remain silent or, alternatively, to sing with joy.

The Law of Suffering. We submit when confronted with barbaric violence, let go of our individual egos, and endure suffering.

We don’t try to dodge the blows, defend ourselves, or flee. Does that submission to violence mean we are sacrificing ourselves for nothing? Absolutely not. Our suffering is not in vain. We are awakening the conscience of the nation and all humankind. Our goal is ultimately to vanquish violence. Suffering is honorable, not failure. Suffering is much more effective than appeals to rationality in rousing the conscience.

Gandhi said: “[T]hings of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering. . . . [I]f you want something really important to be

done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also.” This is what he called the “Law of Suffering.”

It’s a much smaller sacrifice compared to violent resistance, but, still, sacrifice is unavoidable. We must be willing to suffer and sacrifice to the bitter end. We must prepare for the worst. We may encounter dark forces with no moral scruples, no matter how gentle and kind we are. In nonviolent social movements, we may pay a huge price, even sacrificing our lives.

When the fists and clubs come out, the heart must remain as still as water. If we simply leave things to chance, the moment that greater and more horrific violence strikes, we will be afraid and we will falter, and then the violence will become even more rampant. This is not a lack of respect for life, not making needless sacrifice. Rather, it is the highest expression of respect for life. To overcome fear and suffering, we must embrace the energy that comes from completely letting go of our egos.

The Law of Dignity. We must defend our own dignity and the dignity of our adversaries.

Nonviolence is dignified action. Defend your own dignity. When they surround and abuse us, never talk back. Demonstrate your good manners instead. You must not allow hatred or fear to take root in your heart. Even if they knock you to the ground, you must remain firm and dignified. People have a conscience. Some people may remain unmoved out of ignorance. We are trying to move the nation.

We must protect the other person’s dignity as well. Do not try to humiliate the other person. You may criticize them for doing evil deeds, but you must never humiliate them as human beings. There are no evil people in this world, only people who have done evil things.

We must not be arrogant. We must not think highly of ourselves when we are victorious. After the North’s victory in the American Civil War, Lincoln didn’t humiliate or punish the other side. Instead, he called on both sides to rebuild the country together. So, the wounds healed quickly. This should be an example for us.

Nonviolent Offense

History has come a long way to our time when totalitarianism is in retreat and we are moving forward. They are on the defensive, while we are on the offensive. In the end, they will be the losers and we will be the winners.

We have always been on the offensive when it comes to actively launching social movements, whether it’s going to investigate “black jails,” promoting equal access to education, or fighting for equal treatment in care for the elderly. Nonviolent social movements require attention to things like strategy, choice of issues, setting goals, optimal planning, division of labor, and training in how to maintain movement discipline.

Choosing issues. It's important to identify topics that society is generally concerned about and issues involving public interests. Segregation based on household registration and the denial of equal education rights is a relevant issue for the more than 200 million new urban immigrants who are victims of these policies. High gas prices, high taxes, and social security inequality are issues of major public interest. Don't forget to consider non-material, moral interests. Personal tragedies, such as the death of a Tunisian trader or the death of Sun Zhigang, sparked anger on a national level.

You can actively initiate action around issues, such as by commemorating a certain holiday or gathering victims to protest pervasive social injustice. There are also incidents that arise suddenly, such as the death of environmental activist Lei Yang following an altercation with police or incidents involving bogus vaccines. Timely intervention in such matters requires setting objectives, guiding public opinion, and making reasonable demands.

When it comes to setting objectives, make your goals realistic and achievable. There are different levels of goals. You can choose to wear down the regime's strength, achieve individualized justice, change laws and policies, or bring an end to the autocratic regime and establish democracy. You need to consider the practical environment, weigh the relative strengths of progressive and regressive forces, and be clear about your targets.

The most effective way to support victims whose rights have been violated is to help them set realistic and achievable goals. Angry victims in vaccine scandals demand accountability and compensation. But we have to recognize the difficulty of achieving accountability under the current regime. And the legal system has difficulty determining cause and effect when it comes to compensation. A compensation fund to provide treatment for victims and support for families is thus both a pressing and feasible goal.

Sometimes, the focus should be on results. At other times, the process may be more important than the outcome. In the fight for the rights of migrant children to take the university entrance examination in the places where their parents live and work, the desired outcome was practical and achievable. There was a strong push in favor and resistance was not so strong. Some interest demands are very difficult to achieve, especially if they touch on the system of privileges or are aimed at the growth of civil society. While it may take years of effort to achieve even limited results, citizens will become more united and stronger in the process.

We don't confront the entire regime all the time. The establishment too is made up of people, and people have different ideas and values. They have a high degree of consensus on some things and may lack consensus on others. They share common interests, but each person's particular interests vary. "Depoliticization" is a strategy that can be used to separate an individual from the establishment and bring them to your side. It doesn't matter when someone joins the fight. They're all on the same path and should be tolerant of each other.

Optimal planning. Sustainability is essential for action. We must find the right methods and paths, plan strategically, and set a time frame for action. In the campaign for educational equality, the first phase of the struggle was to achieve equality in the transition from primary to junior high school. This was achieved in six months. Then, we set our sights on equality in the university entrance examination. We petitioned the Ministry of Education on the last Thursday of every month. Our work centered around these petitioning actions, doing things like collecting signatures, holding seminars, and contacting people's congress delegates. By establishing set days and setting a rhythm of activity, we can ensure the long-term sustainability of our actions.

Great television shows are usually split into seasons and are designed to achieve a certain pacing of time. Without seasons, it's quite possible for a program to start strong but lose momentum as time goes on. Our actions are also divided into seasons, with strategies, battles, and rhythms. We move forward according to plans. Social movements rarely come about overnight. A movement can last for a long time and continually grow. Setting rhythmic points in time, such as specific days of the month, is a good way to turn the action into a ritual and unite the team while extending the action.

Mobilizing the public to participate without fear. Fear is still widespread. Demands to “overthrow” and “defeat” remain part of a discourse of fear and hatred and make the public afraid to participate. Even when it comes to issues of simple livelihood, people become afraid when you try to mobilize them directly to participate in petitioning or rallies. The collection of signatures is an accessible entry point for people to get involved. Some people will dare to sign on as a way of expressing their views. We can then find more active participants among the signatories and lead people to participate in more concrete actions.

Publicizing the truth. Truth is an important force. When a nonviolent movement is suppressed, it will gain more support if the process is fully publicized and the public's energies are aroused. The regime refuses to release video footage, covers up the truth, and discredits citizen rights defenders. We publicize the truth in a timely manner in order to amplify our rights defense actions. Every action or instance of suffering can lead to social mobilization when presented publicly.

We use the media and the internet to get the truth out there. We can also directly appeal to the public, for example, by making speeches and presenting our case to them. We can wear T-shirts with logos or slogans in subway stations, shopping malls, or on the street. We can distribute leaflets to the public or print pamphlets. We can put up huge posters on slopes or open spaces or develop slogans that resonate with the public.

Protest actions. When it comes to rallies, demonstrations, and marches, it is imperative that these occasions not be used as an outlet for anger and resentment, nor should they feature violent destruction of property. Blocking roads or entrances should be avoided, and every effort should be made not to disturb normal working life. The public must have confidence in the organizers,

who should demonstrate that protesters are making reasonable demands and acting in a calm and rational manner.

Hunger strikes. A hunger strike is an action of last resort when all other efforts have failed. Before risking your life, you must consider the price you are willing to pay for the struggle and avoid letting the action fizzle out. A hunger strike must be genuine and not half-hearted or faked. Your political behavior must be appropriate. You must not come across as too extreme, give the impression that you are making trouble out of nothing, or blow things out of proportion.

The hunger striker must be the right person to make this sacrifice. This involves consideration of their morality, image, and degree of public recognition. If the public simply doesn't care or understand the logic of the sacrifice, then a hunger strike is the wrong tactic. A hunger strike must have a specific and realistic goal. Hunger strikes should be conducted as part of a nonviolent social movement and are not for those in prison. Most importantly, a hunger strike should only be undertaken after all other options have been exhausted.

Fasting for 24 hours is a more viable option. In a society that lacks a religious tradition, fasting can be an effective way to enhance participants' purity and belief and boost the energy of the movement. A day of fasting on specially chosen days can be a kind of spiritual practice for a citizen movement.

Discipline. Nonviolent movements require discipline. When individuals cannot restrain themselves and give in to violent impulses, perhaps because they have been provoked, it gives the regime an excuse for violent repression. The other side may try to insult, beat, or enrage you, but you must never take the bait or fight back. Do not provoke others or attempt to defend yourself. Do not humiliate or be arrogant towards others. Do not engage in any form of attack, including verbally. Instead, be courteous and smile calmly.

You must also embrace spiritual discipline. Meditate, pray, purify your faith, say goodbye to fear, and move boldly forward.

Compromise. Make compromises at the right times. Focus on winning stage by stage and back off when necessary. Non-cooperation is part of our citizen's movement. This means refusing to cooperate with evil, not total non-cooperation with those in charge. Sometimes, compromise is the best strategic move.

Social movements require intelligence and rationality. Make compromises when it is the right time to do so. Do not try to achieve constitutional democracy all in one go. This is one of the lessons of 1989. Gandhi's suspension of the non-cooperation movement during World War II is a good example of strategic compromise. You can also compromise on tactics, such as over the route of a march or smaller details. You must aim to accumulate small victories in order to give people the confidence they really badly need.

Nonviolent Defense

In a dark place entirely devoid of any outside scrutiny — a detention center, a prison, or a place of unlawful detention — violent resistance only provokes savage behavior from those in charge. You can file a complaint, but it will be ignored. You can shout all you want, but your tormentor will only despise you. You can try covering your vital areas, but he will only laugh at you. Your efforts will just be met with more savage violence.

A friend told me that you should scream when you're being beaten. You must consider the situation from the other person's point of view. He believes he's just carrying out the task he's been given by his superiors. To him, it's a symbolic beating meant to intimidate you. But if he thinks you're pretending, he'll feel disdain and that will inspire more savagery, which will lead in turn to greater violence.

The best approach is to be completely stoic and bear the beating calmly. Never cry out, never shed tears, never hide, and never give in. Our only hope is in the knowledge that the other person is a human being, a fellow member of the human race with a conscience and a sense of shame. Otherwise, there is only utter despair.

In this post-totalitarian state, those who do the beating for the regime no longer do it out of class hatred. They beat us because that's their role. They think, "This is how I make my living. My superiors ordered me to give someone a beating, so I have to do it." This justification of evil by saying it's his job is a clear sign of inner frailty. In thinking this, his conscience has already begun to stir. Violence is meant to intimidate. If we are fearful and hateful, they have achieved their goal. If we are magnanimous, serene, and compassionate, the regime's violence will begin to soften.

We may have to face "soft" violence, or quasi-torture. For example, you might be forced to go for long periods with no sleep, guarded closely by armed police. It's a battle of faith and will. When you are prepared to lay down your life, this kind of thing no longer matters.

Our role on the long road to civilization is that of enabler. Our adversary's role is to be an obstacle. Without obstacles, there would be no progress to speak of. If there were no evil, there would be no good. History would truly be nihilistic. There will always be people whose role it is to stand in the way of progress. History is the richer for it, and we are the more powerful for it.

We play a different role in this world. We live our lives earnestly and hold fast to what we know is right. Sometimes, looking down at the earthly world from way up high, we can see the different roles being played. With a transcendent mind, we can see ourselves suffering and see the roles being played by our adversaries. There is no anger, no fear. Our glory, the meaning of our lives, is to perfect this world through our trials and tribulations. This transcendence is also a deconstruction of tyranny.

Toward a Better Future

The atmosphere in this country is too ruthless and tyrannical. “Interceptors” beat petitioners to death, urban management officers beat up street vendors, police beat up people protesting the collapse of peer-to-peer lending platforms, and there is even frequent violence on school campuses. Behind this lies a spiritual wilderness filled with fear, hostility, and the belief that violence must be used to control violence.

Many worry about China’s future. Will the end of dictatorship lead to a Syrian-style barbaric free-for-all? Will history repeat the tragic cycle that has played out countless times already?

We share those concerns. The legacy of autocracy runs too deep in this land. Even some democratic activists fantasize about violent revolution and the day when they will be in a position of power to do whatever they want. The regime also keeps frightening the public into believing that everything would turn to chaos without them.

We must change the course of history, avoid chaos and turmoil, and lead the way to a better future. We will heed the call of modern civilization and say goodbye forever to barbaric dictatorship. We will build a better China of constitutional democracy, freedom, justice, and love.

We can change the course of history. For millennia, the light of humanity has been suppressed, but it has never been destroyed. In a land of darkness, people yearn for the light all the more. China is not the same as it was a century ago. Most importantly, our generation of Chinese people who pursue democracy and freedom are not like those who “fight to occupy the throne.” We have love, wisdom, and commitment.

Nonviolence is our strategy. Violent revolution is completely out of the question. More than that, non-violence is our faith. When we are filled with the energy of love, we can end the darkness and make history.

Nonviolence at the level of techniques or tactics is far from enough to transform Chinese civilization. This battle for civilization is a spiritual battle for hearts and minds. We are not trying to kill the national monsters that have been running amok for 2,000 years. We are trying to tame them and make them safeguard the people’s freedom, security, and well-being.

Love is the only thing that can end China’s 2,000-year-old tradition of autocracy. Trust in love will enable nonviolence to cleanse the national soul.

We have found the path to the rebirth of Chinese civilization! Through a nonviolent citizen’s movement, we can recreate the national character and achieve constitutional transformation and rebirth of our civilization.