

令人髮指

ling4 ren2 fa4 zhi3

Rioters turned streets in Mong Kok into a war zone, attacking and injuring police officers and journalists, setting fire and destroying properties. Their acts have been roundly (嚴厲地) condemned and many critics used the idiom “令人髮指” (*ling4 ren2 fa4 zhi3*) to describe such uncivilized conduct.

“令” (*ling4*) is “to order or instruct,” “to cause or make,” “人” (*ren2*) “people,” “others,” “髮” (*fa4*) “hair” and “指” (*zhi3*) “to point at.” Literally, “令人髮指” (*ling4 ren2 fa4 zhi3*) is “make people hair point,” “make one’s hair stand on end.”

“令人髮指” (*ling4 ren2 fa4 zhi3*) means “make one’s hair stand up in great anger,” “to be extremely insulted or irritated,” “infuriating.”

The idiom has the same meaning as the English expression “to get one’s hackles up,” “to make one’s hackles rise,” “to make one’s blood boil,” meaning to make one extremely angry.

Idiom by Lon Yan

Hackles are “the erectile hairs along the back of a dog or other animal that rise when it is angry or alarmed” and raising hair remains a “vestigial (退化的) ability” in humans as an involuntary response to strong emotions.

Technically, “髮指” (*fa4 zhi3*) “hair pointing” or “hair standing on end” is called piloerection. But since we do not have a lot of body hair, this physiological reaction is hardly noticeable to others.

“令人髮指” (*ling4 ren2 fa4 zhi3*) is a term reserved for very serious misconduct, usually of the criminal kind, such as that seen in the Mong Kok riot, or those who abuse disabled people under their care.

Terms containing the character “髮” (*fa4*) include:

頭髮 (*tou2 fa4*) – human hair on top of the head

髮妻 (*fa4 qi1*) – first wife

髮廊 (*fa4 lang2*) – a hair salon

髮菜 (*fa4 cai4*) – fat choy, black moss