

無法無天

wu2 fa3 wu2 tian1

Several teenage boys were seen playing mah-jong in waist-deep water - indoors.

The photo was taken at the dormitory of a school in Fangcheng, Guangxi. At a glance, it looks like their room has been flooded, probably by heavy rain. The readers' hearts might go out to the boys, as they wouldn't have a dry bed to sleep in.

But closer reading of the text reveals a totally different story. The room was, indeed, flooded, but not by natural causes, but by the boys, who suddenly fancied a swim. So they sealed the gap under the door and turned on the water, and viola! Instant swimming pool.

They were seen having a whale of a time, some splashing around merrily, one boy doing the breaststroke while others had a game of mahjong. There is no news yet as to what happened to them when the school found out - and it certainly did - about their antics. Hopefully they were

Idiom by Lon Yan

not expelled. But what they did can really be described as “無法無天” (wu2 fa3 wu2 tian1).

“無” (wu2) is “nil,” “without,” “法” (fa3) “the law” and “天” (tian1) “the sky,” “the heaven.” Literally, “無法無天” (wu2 fa3 wu2 tian1) is “no law, no sky.” It means “to defy laws human and divine,” “to become absolutely lawless,” “to run wild,” “lawless and godless.”

Criminals who rob banks and push old ladies to the ground are “無法無天” (wu2 fa3 wu2 tian1). People who do outrageous things can also be described as “無法無天” (wu2 fa3 wu2 tian1), even if no law is actually broken.

Terms containing the character “法” (fa3) include:

法庭 (fa3 ting2) - a law court

法官 (fa3 guan1) - a judge

法治 (fa3 zhi4) - rule of law

法國 (fa3 guo2) - France