

觸目驚心

chu4 mu4 jing1 xin1

There was a horrific (令人恐懼的) lift accident in the mainland. A young woman in Hangzhou was decapitated (斬首) when the elevator she was entering took off.

The head of the 24-year-old victim was carried one floor up before the lift stopped. Her body remained on the lower floor.

In the news picture, readers could only see rescue workers holding the woman's body. Gruesome (恐怖的) details were not shown, but that still was a very shocking sight.

The idiom that describes such a scene is “觸目驚心” (*chu4 mu4 jing1 xin1*).

“觸” (*chu4*) is contact, “目” (*mu4*) is “the eye,” “驚” (*jing1*) is “frightened,” “startled” and “心” (*xin1*) means “the heart,” “the mind.” Literally, “觸目驚心” (*chu4 mu4 jing1 xin1*) is “contact eye frightens heart.”

As a term, “觸目” means “meets the eyes.” If what meets the eyes frightens the heart, it must be a

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ghastly sight or something that is terrifying to see, which is what the idiom means.

The idiom is reserved for describing scenes that are really shocking and terrifying. The sight of someone who scraped his knees does not qualify. The bloody scene of a traffic accident with bodies and limbs lying around is certainly “觸目驚心” (*chu4 mu4 jing1 xin1*).

The idiom is often used to describe the aftermath of a catastrophe. For example, when an earthquake destroys a whole village or a town, injuring and killing many, we can say that the scene is “觸目驚心” (*chu4 mu4 jing1 xin1*).

Rescuers arriving at the site of the collapsed World Trade Center towers in New York after the terrorist attack must have found the sight “觸目驚心.”

Terms containing the character “驚” (*jing1*) include:

驚動 (*jing1 dong4*) - to trouble, disturb

驚慌 (*jing1 huang1*) - be alarmed, startled

驚恐 (*jing1 kong3*) - be scared, terrified, frightened

驚奇 (*jing1 qi2*) - to show surprise