To watch a man drowned without attempting to help is bad enough. To record and mock him as he struggles in the water and goes under is cold-blooded.

That was exactly what five teenagers in Florida did to a disabled man in distress in a pond. They even posted the video online. But there isn’t much that can be done about such heinous conduct, as there’s no law requiring people to help a stranger. The youths were eventually charged with failing to report a death.

Meanwhile, a woman in China rode her scooter over the legs of a six-year-old girl as she cried in pain. Someone took a video and posted it online, and it has caused outrage. Such people and their conducts can only be described as “禽獸不如” (qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2).

“禽” (qin2) is “birds,” “獸” (shou4) “an animal,” “a beast.” “禽獸” (qin2 shou4) as a term, means “birds and beast,” “less than human.” “不如” (qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2) is “not equal to,” “not as good as,” “inferior to,” “less than.” Literally, “禽獸不如” (qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2) is “inferior to birds and beast,” “worse than animals.”

The idiom means “to behave immorally.” It is used to describe the worst kind of people. It's the same as saying a person is not worthy to be called a human being; or calling someone “subhuman,” “scum.” We don’t call a petty thief “禽獸不如” (qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2), but we can use the idiom on a rapist, or someone who beat a child to death.

Terms containing the character “獸” (shou4) include:

野獸 (ye3 shou4) – a wild animal

獸性 (shou4 xing4) – brutish nature; barbarity

獸醫 (shou4 yi1) – a veterinarian

獸行 (shou4 xing2) – brutal act