

《To the Edge of the Grave (from The Beast of Burden in  
On A Chinese Screen)》 by Somerset Maugham

At first when you see the coolie on the road, bearing his load, it is as a pleasing object that he strikes the eye. In his blue rags, a blue of all colours from indigo to turquoise and then to the paleness of a milky sky, he fits the landscape. He seems exactly right as he trudges along the narrow causeway between the rice fields or climbs a green hill. His clothing consists of no more than a short coat and a pair of trousers; and if he had a suit which was at the beginning all of a piece, he never thinks when it comes to patching to choose a bit of stuff of the same colour. He takes anything that comes handy. From sun and rain he protects his head with a straw hat shaped like an extinguisher with a preposterously wide, flat brim.

You see a string of coolies come along, one after the other, each with a pole on his shoulders from the ends of which hang two great bales, and they make an agreeable pattern. It is amusing to watch their hurrying reflections in the padi water. You watch their faces as they pass you. They are good-natured faces and frank, you would have said, if it had not been drilled into you that the oriental is inscrutable; and when you see them lying down with their loads under a banyan tree by a wayside shrine, smoking and chatting gaily, if you have tried to lift the bales they carry for thirty miles or more a day,

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最初看到走在路上的挑夫，背着重擔子，眼裏只覺得是個賞心悅目的景象。他穿著藍色的破衣服，各種各樣的藍色——由靛青到湖水藍再到天藍的淡乳藍——都在那一身襤褸上，正好像他融入四周的景色。看他踏著沉重的腳步走過四面狹窄的阡陌，或爬上綠色的山坡，使人覺得他每一步都是那麼平穩妥當。他一身衣服就只是件短上衣加條褲子；這套衣服當初也許都來自同一塊料子，可是到了縫補時他却從沒想到要找些同色的小布丁，只是手邊有什麼就用什麼。他戴了草帽來遮日蔽雨，帽緣扁而闊，形狀惹笑，活像十減只筒。

你看著一隊挑夫走過來，一個接著一個，人人肩上一根扁担，垂下兩個大包包，構成一幅悅目的圖案。看見他們悠閒的樣子倒映在稻田裏，只覺得有趣。他們走過的時候，可以讓你細看那一張張的臉。要不是自小便聽說東方人高深莫測，你準會說那些臉孔善良坦率。你看見他們卸下背包，躺在路邊祠堂旁的榕樹下，輕鬆的——一邊抽煙，一邊閒扯，如果你試拿起他們的每天背著走三十多哩的包的話，便只會

it seems natural to feel admiration for their endurance and their spirit. But you will be thought somewhat absurd if you mention your admiration to the old residents of China. You will be told with a tolerant shrug of the shoulders that the coolies are animals and for two thousand years from father to son have carried burdens, so it is no wonder if they do it cheerfully. And indeed you can see for yourself that they begin early, for you will encounter little children with a yoke on their shoulders staggering under the weight of vegetable baskets.

The day wears on and it grows warmer. The coolies take off their coats and walk stripped to the waist. Then sometimes in a man resting for an instant, his load on the ground but the pole still on his shoulders so that he has to rest slightly crouched, you see the poor tired heart beating against the ribs: you see it as plainly as in some cases of heart disease in the out-patients' room of a hospital. It is strangely distressing to watch. Then also you see the coolies' backs. The pressure of the pole for long years, day after day, has made hard red scars, and sometimes even there are open sores, great sores without bandages or dressing that rub against the wood; but the strangest thing of all is that sometimes, as though nature sought to adapt man for these cruel uses to which he is put, an odd malformation seems to have arisen so that there is a sort of hump, like a camel's, against which the pole rests. But beating heart or angry sore, bitter rain or burning sun notwithstanding, they go on eternally, from dawn till dusk, year in year out, from childhood to the extreme of age.

敬佩他們的耐力和精神。但你要把這欽慕之情向中國的老一輩提起，他們卻會覺得莫名其妙，還會輕描淡寫的聳肩，說挑夫天生如此，兩千多年來都是父傳子，子傳孫的肩負重担；他們的高，壯，的軀體也不是什麼奇怪的尋。真的，你自己也親眼目睹他們實在很早便開始了。路上你總會遇到一些小孩子，肩上一根棍子，挑着菜籃，在重担下顛顛跛跛的走著。時間慢，過去，天氣漸，變暖。挑夫脫去上衣，赤裸着上身走過。其中一個偶然停下來休息片刻。他讓背脊坐在地上，扁担仍然橫放兩肩，所以他的是一蹲著的姿勢——於是你清楚看到了，那顆累得可憐的心在胸前一沉一伏，就像在醫院的診療室裏的心臟病人一樣，叫人看，心裡實在難過。然後你又看到了他們的肩膀。長年累月、日復一日的重压，留下了又紅又硬的疤痕，有時甚至是破了的傷口，老大老大的傷口，既無繃帶，也沒敷藥，就乾癟着木担子。最奇怪的是，上天好像為了使他們能適應這殘酷的勞役，竟讓他們的肩變得畸形，長出駝峰般的腫塊，時而要放担子。但不管心房劇跳、傷口疼痛、苦雨烈日，他們也得繼續下去，日出到日落，年頭到年終，所以

You see old men without an ounce of fat on their bodies, their skin loose on their bones, wizened, their little faces wrinkled and ape-like, with hair thin and grey; and they totter under their burdens to the edge of the grave in which at last they shall have rest. And still the coolies go, not exactly running, but not walking either, sidling quickly, with their eyes on the ground to choose the spot to place their feet, and on their faces a strained, anxious expression. You can make no longer a pattern of them as they wend their way. Their effort oppresses you. You are filled with a useless compassion.

新老羣。你看那羣，老去的挑夫，身上一塊肌肉也沒有，皮膚鬆弛的吊在骨頭上，整个人都像枯萎了。他們的細小的臉像猴臉般，滿佈皺紋，頭髮已掉得白稀疏，但仍花担上下蹣跚而行，兩隻腳一伸才跳得到真正休息。於是挑夫仍在繼續前行，他們的既不是奔跑，也不是步行，只是側著身急著前進，眼睛盯著地面，小心選擇下腳的地方，臉上露出緊迫焦慮的表情。看著他們的走勢的樣子，你再不能理出一個圖案了。他們的力氣壓迫著你。你心中雖是充滿了憐憫，但終於事無補。