

Chabuduo Xiansheng 差不多先生傳

A timeless essay on the human condition by Hu Shi.

差不多先生傳

胡適

你知道中國最有名的人是誰？提起此人，人人皆曉，處處聞名。他姓差，名不多，是各省各縣各村人氏。你一定見過他，一定聽過別人談起他；差不多先生的名字，天天掛在大家的口頭，因為他是中國全國人的代表。

nǐ zhī dào zhōng guó zuì yǒu míng de rén shì shéi? tí qǐ cǐ rén, rén rén jiē xiǎo, chǔ chù wén míng。 tā xìng chā, míng bù duō, shì gè shěng gè xiàn gè cūn rén shì。 nǐ yī dìng jiàn guò tā, yī dìng tīng guò bié rén tán qǐ tā; chā bù duō xiān shēng de míng zì, tiān tiān guà zài dà jiā de kǒu tóu yīn wéi tā shì zhōng guó quán guó rén de dài biǎo。

差不多先生的相貌，和你和我都差不多。他有一雙眼，但看的不很清楚；有兩隻耳朵，但聽的不很分明；有鼻子和嘴，但他對於氣味和口味都不很講究；他的腦子也不小，但他的記性卻不很精明，他的思想也不細密。

chā bù duō xiān shēng de xiàng mào, hé nǐ hé wǒ dōu chā bù duō。 tā yǒu yī shuāng yǎn, dàn kàn de bù hěn qīng chǔ; yǒu liǎng zhī ěr duǒ, dàn tīng de bù hěn fēn míng; yǒu bí zi hé zuǐ, dàn tā duì yú qì wèi hé kǒu wèi dōu bù hěn jiǎng jiù; tā de nǎo zi yě bù xiǎo, dàn tā de jì xìng què bù hěn jīng míng, tā de sī xiǎng yě bù xì mì。

他常常說：「凡事只要差不多就好了。何必太精明呢？」

tā cháng cháng shuō: 「fán shì zhǐ yào chā bù duō jiù hǎo le。 hé bì tài jīng míng ne?」

他小的時候，他媽媽叫他買紅糖，他買白糖回來。他媽媽罵他，他搖搖頭道：「紅糖同白糖，不是差不多嗎？」

tā xiǎo de shí hòu, tā mā mā jiào tā mǎi hóng táng, tā mǎi bái táng huí lái。 tā mā mā mà tā, tā yáo yáo tóu dào: 「hóng táng tóng bái táng, bú shì chā bù duō ma?」

他在學堂的時候，先生問他：「直隸省的西邊是那一省？」他說是陝西。先生說：

「錯了。是山西，不是陝西。」他說：「陝西同山西，不是差不多嗎？」

tā zài xué táng de shí hòu, xiān shēng wèn tā : 「zhí lì shěng de xī biān shì nà yī shěng ? 」 tā shuō shì shǎn xī. xiān shēng shuō : 「cuò le. shì shān xī, bú shì shǎn xī. 」 tā shuō : 「shǎn xī tóng shān xī, bú shì chā bù duō ma ? 」

後來他在一個錢舖裡做夥計；他也會寫，也會算，只是總不會精細；十字常常寫成

千字，千字常常寫成十字。掌櫃的生氣了，常常罵他，他只是笑嘻嘻的賠小心道：

「千字比十字只多一小撇，不是差不多嗎？」

hòu lái tā zài yī gè qián pù lǐ zuò huǒ jì ; tā yě huì xiě, yě huì suàn, zhǐ shì zǒng bù huì jīng xì ; shí zì cháng cháng xiě chéng qiān zì, qiān zì cháng cháng xiě chéng shí zì. zhǎng guì de shēng qì le, cháng cháng mà tā, tā zhǐ shì xiào xī xī de péi xiǎo xīn dào : 「qiān zì bǐ shí zì zhǐ duō yī xiǎo piě, bú shì chā bù duō ma ? 」

有一天，他為了一件要緊的事，要搭火車到上海去，他從從容容的走到火車站，遲

了兩分鐘，火車已開走了。他白瞪著眼，望著遠遠的火車上的煤煙，搖搖頭道：

「只好明天再走了，今天走同明天走，也還差不多；可是火車公司未免太認真了。

八點三十分開，同八點三十二分開，不是差不多嗎？」他一面說，一面慢慢的走回

家，心理總不很明白為什麼火車不肯等他兩分鐘。

yǒu yī tiān, tā wéi le yī jiàn yào jǐn de shì, yào dā huǒ chē dào shàng hǎi qù, tā cóng cóng róng róng de zǒu dào huǒ chē zhàn, chí le liǎng fēn zhōng, huǒ chē yǐ kāi zǒu le. tā bái dèng a yǎn, wàng a yuǎn yuǎn de huǒ chē shàng de méi yān, yáo yáo tóu dào : 「zhǐ hǎo míng tiān zài zǒu le, jīn tiān zǒu tóng míng tiān zǒu, yě huán chā bù duō ; kě shì huǒ chē gōng sī wèi miǎn tài rèn zhēn le. bā diǎn sān shí fēn kāi, tíng bā diǎn sān shí èr fēn kāi, bú shì chā bù duō ma ? 」 tā yī miàn shuō, yī miàn màn màn de zǒu huí jiā, xīn lǐ zǒng bù hěn míng bái wéi shén me huǒ chē bù kěn děng tā liǎng fēn zhōng.

有一天，他忽然得了一急病，趕快叫家人去請東街的汪先生。那家人急急忙忙的跑

過去，一時尋不著東街的汪大夫，卻把西街的牛醫王大夫請來了。差不多先生生病

在床上，知道尋錯了人；但病急了，身上的痛苦，心裡焦急，等不得了，心裡想道：

「好在王大夫同汪大夫也差不多，讓他試試看罷。」於是這位牛醫王大夫走近床前，

用醫牛的法子給差不多先生治病。不上一點鐘，差不多先生就一命嗚呼了。差不多

先生差不多要死的時候，一口氣斷斷續續的說道：「活人同死人也差……差……差

……不多，……凡是只要……差……差……不多……就……好了，……何……必…

…太……太認真呢？」他說完了這句格言，就絕了氣。

yǒu yī tiān, tā hū rán de le yī jí bìng, gǎn kuài jiào jiā rén qù qǐng dōng jiē de wāng xiān shēng. nà jiā rén jí jí máng máng de pǎo guò qù, yī shí xún bù a dōng jiē de wāng dài fū, què bǎ xī jiē de niú yī wáng dài fū qǐng lái le. chā bù duō xiān shēng shēng bìng zài chuáng shàng, zhī dào xún cuò le rén ; dàn bìng jí le, shēn shàng de tòng kǔ, xīn lǐ jiāo jí, děng bù de le, xīn lǐ xiǎng dào : 「hǎo zài wáng dài fū tóng wāng dài fū yě chā bù duō, ràng tā shì shì kàn bà。」 yú shì zhè wèi niú yī wáng dài fū zǒu jìn chuáng qián, yòng yī niú de fǎ zi gěi chā bù duō xiān shēng zhì bìng。 bù shàng yī diǎn zhōng, chā bù duō xiān shēng jiù yī mìng wū hū le。 chā bù duō xiān shēng chā bù duō yào sǐ de shí hòu, yī kǒu qì duàn duàn xù xù de shuō dào : 「huó rén tóng sǐ rén yě chā.....chā.....chā.....bù duō,fán shì zhī yào.....chā.....chā.....bù duō.....jiù.....hǎo le,hé.....bì.....tài.....tài rèn zhēn ne?」 tā shuō wán le zhè jù gé yán, jiù jué le qì。

他死後，大家都稱讚差不多先生樣樣事情看得破，想的通；大家都說他一生不肯

認真，不肯算帳，不肯計較，真是一位有德行的人。於是大家給他取個死後的法號，

叫他做「圓通大師」。他的名譽越傳越遠，越久越大，無數無數的人，都學他的榜

樣。於是人人都成了一個差不多先生。——然而中國從此就成了一個懶人國了。

tā sǐ hòu, dà jiā dōu hěn chēng zàn chā bù duō xiān shēng yàng yàng shì qíng kàn de pò, xiǎng de tōng ; dà jiā dōu shuō tā yī shēng bù kěn rèn zhēn, bù kěn suàn zhàng, bù kěn jì jiào, zhēn shì yī wèi yǒu dé xíng de rén。 yú shì dà jiā gěi tā qǔ gè sǐ hòu de fǎ hào, jiào tā zuò 「yuán tōng dà shī」。 tā de míng yù yuè chuán yuè yuǎn, yuè jiǔ yuè dà, wú shù wú shù de rén, dōu xué tā de bǎng yàng。 yú shì rén rén dōu chéng le yī gè chā bù duō xiān shēng。 —rán ér zhōng guó cóng cǐ jiù chéng le yī gè lǎn rén guó le。

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English Translation

The Life of Mr. Chabuduo (Mr. "Close-Enough")

By Hu Shih

Do you know who the most famous person in China is? Just mention his name and everybody will recognize it. His last name is "Cha" (差) and his first name is "Bu-Duo" (不多). Every province, county, and village has someone named after him. It is certain that you have seen him - and you have undoubtedly heard others talk about him. Each day, Mr. Chabuduo's name is uttered by countless people to the extent that he has come to represent the entire population of China.

Mr. Chabuduo's appearance resembles yours and mine. He has two eyes - but does not see things very clearly. He has two ears - but they don't listen very well. He has a nose and a mouth, but does not distinguish much between different smells and tastes. His head isn't particularly small - however - his memory isn't very good.

He would often say, "Things only have to be done 'chabuduo' (meaning 'more-or-less' or 'close enough') to be good. After all, what sense does it make to be a perfectionist and waste the time and effort necessary to have things absolutely correct all the time?"

When he was a small child, his mother sent him out to buy some brown sugar. He came back with white sugar. His mother scolded him - but the young Mr. Chabuduo simply shook his head and said, "Brown sugar - white sugar! Are they not both just about the same?"

Once, while attending school, a teacher asked him which province was located on the western border of Hebei. He answered by saying it was Shaanxi (陕西). "Wrong!" the teacher corrected him. "It is Shanxi (山西) not Shaanxi (陕西)." At this, Mr. Chabuduo remarked, "Well aren't Shanxi and Shaanxi just about the same?"

Afterwards, he worked in a bank. While capable of both writing and doing math - he was never very careful. Often, he turned the character "+" (10) into "千" (1000), and would write the character for 1000 (千) as the character for 10 (+). This infuriated the bank manager who would routinely reprimand him. Mr. Chabuduo's response to these incidents was always to reply with a smirking sort of countenance that the number for 1,000 "千" differed from the number for 10 "+" by only one simple stroke of the pen - wasn't that close enough?

One day, in order to take care of an urgent affair he wanted to go by train to Shanghai. He casually strolled to the station arriving 2 minutes late. The train, being on schedule, had already left. He stared blankly at the distant trail of smoke left by the departing train and shook his head. "I guess I'll just go tomorrow," he said. "After all, going tomorrow is just about the same as going today. But these people who run the trains are entirely too serious

about keeping to their schedule. After all, isn't 8:32 just about the same as 8:30?" As he spoke he slowly began to return home. He truly could not understand why the train couldn't wait just two minutes for him.

Finally, the time came when Mr. Chabuduo suddenly became very sick. He hurriedly asked his family to go get Dr. Wong (汪) who lived on East Street. A family member ran off for a short while looking for this Dr. Wong, but got confused in the excitement and ended up on West Street where he happened to find Dr. Wong (王) the veterinarian. Since, after all, the doctor's name was "Wong" and it was necessary to find somebody with a medical background back to deal with this emergency, Dr. Wong the veterinarian was persuaded to make a house call at the Chabuduo residence. Mr. Chabuduo – who was now so ill that he could not get out of bed – knew that his family had fetched the wrong Dr. Wong. Nevertheless, since his condition had become so desperate, his pain so great, and his heart so anxious for relief, Chabuduo said to himself, "Luckily this Dr. Wong (王) the veterinarian is "chabuduo" the same as Dr. Wong (汪) the M.D. – I might as well let him take a look at me." At this point, Dr. Wong the veterinarian, knowing that there was little time left to try anything else, approached the bed and attempted to cure his patient with the same methods used to treat sick cattle. In less than an hour, Mr. Chabuduo was dead.

As Mr. Chabuduo was dying, he uttered in an uneven breath, "The living and the dead are cha.....cha.....buduo – just about the same – and as long as everything is cha.....cha.....buduo, then things will be fine. Why.....be.....too serious?" After these final words, he took his last gasp of air.

After his death, people began to praise Mr. Chabuduo for his outlook on life and his capability of reasoning with himself despite the circumstances. It was declared that the equanimity that he displayed in the face of death was due to his not being overly conscientious nor hung up on details such as balancing books and settling accounts. Because he never made a fuss about things being exactly right, he was considered a model of morality and virtue. Upon his death, Mr. Chabuduo was regarded as a saint and became known to all by a Buddhist title naming him the "Great Master of Flexibility" (圆通大师).

With each passing day, Mr. Chabuduo's reputation continues to spread far and wide. Countless people study his example with the result that everyone is now becoming a "Mr. Chabuduo." This is the reason why China is quickly being transformed into a country that the rest of the world will soon call "the Nation of Laziness."

(Tr. RS Bond)

Notes:

1. Depending on its context, 差不多 "Chabuduo" can be translated as "close-enough, almost, just about, approximately, etc." Literally, it means, "Difference not much."
2. Dr. Hu Shih was a philosopher and eminent man of letters who served as the Chinese ambassador to the United States from 1938 to 1942 and later became the chancellor of Peking University. Upset with the "close-enough-for-government-work" mentality of many civil servants and students whose poor performance was becoming an embarrassment to a modernizing China, Hu Shih penned this essay in 1924 as a protest to their attitude and a

warning of the consequences of adopting mediocrity as an institutional ideal. During the communist takeover of Mainland China, Hu Shih moved to Taiwan where he continued his literary and academic career. He died on February 24, 1962 at the age of 71 and is recognized as one of the most influential contributors to modern Chinese literature.