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Two women carry trays suspended from shoulder poles in a street at Hoi An. Both woman wear conical sunhats and loose, pajama-style work clothes.

This method of transporting food or other goods while walking depends on the equal balancing of front and back loads to enable the carrier to shoulder more weight. Another advantage of these pole-suspended baskets is that one of the carrier's arms remains free while the other merely stabilizes the shoulder board.

Maintaining balance is an important concept and goal in Southeast Asia, not only in everyday technologies, but also in social and cosmic relationships. Family and community members try to stay in balance or harmony with one another, and misfortune is often said to result when humans do not stay in balance with each other or elements of the natural world.



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