

# THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

## Chapter 1: The Art of Farming – Every Hoe and Turn Requires Skill

“Ow, it hurts.”

Su Jie set down the hoe, his palms covered in blisters.

He wanted to straighten his back to catch his breath, but the ache in his waist and the sharp pain in his back made it impossible to stretch out his sore muscles.

As a city student, working in the fields initially felt novel. But after half a day of hoeing, his arms felt as heavy as lead, and it seemed as though ants were gnawing at his bones. Even worse, the hoe had rubbed raw blisters onto his hands, making every slight touch sting unbearably.

Su Jie had been at the "Minglun Martial Arts Academy" for two days now.

He had enrolled in their short-term summer martial arts training program.

Their coach, Gu Yang, hadn't taught them any martial arts moves yet. On the first day, he had taken the entire class straight to the countryside to help elderly farmers who had lost their ability to work. Armed with hoes, they plowed the fields and performed farm labor.

For two full days, all Su Jie had learned was how to lift the hoe, dig the soil, turn it over, and break it apart until the hardened ground became loose and breathable, suitable for planting.

He never imagined farming could be so exhausting. Only now did he truly understand the meaning of the ancient poem, "Ploughing the fields under the scorching sun, each drop of sweat drips into the soil below."

"I swear, I'll never waste food again. Hoeing, digging, and turning soil is actually a skillful craft..."

For the past two days, he had been carefully observing Coach Gu Yang's movements as he worked the land.

Every time Gu Yang wielded the hoe, he would plant one foot firmly, and his body moved like a lever. Without exerting much effort, the heavy hoe seemed to rise effortlessly, before swiftly plunging down, hooking into the compacted soil. With a pull and a turn, it looked as if he were fishing a giant carp out of water.

Chunks of earth would lift and tumble, and with a precise strike of the hoe, the clods would shatter into fine, soft particles, as delicate as steamed cake.

Watching Gu Yang's ease in hoeing and turning the soil felt almost like witnessing an art form.

At first, Su Jie could barely use the hoe, even with all his strength, and couldn't manage to dig deeply. But by studying and imitating Gu Yang's technique, he gradually mastered the coach's method. It made the task much less grueling.

"You need to twist your waist and align your shoulders when digging," Gu Yang explained in detail, even demonstrating step by step. "Use the strength of your core to lift the hoe. When you lunge forward, let your body lean

slightly, like a cat pouncing on a mouse. Apply your entire weight downward to drive the hoe into the soil. When flipping the soil, you must combine strength and finesse—press downward, scoop, and flip in one smooth motion...”

The coach taught them patiently, even correcting their movements personally.

Under the blazing sun, everyone’s skin had peeled from sunburn.

Although the connection between digging soil and martial arts was unclear, Su Jie still applied himself diligently.

Yet, he still couldn’t replicate Gu Yang’s smooth, elastic motions. The coach’s every move brimmed with spring-like resilience, as if his body were made of intertwined steel wires and coiled springs. He never seemed tired from the labor.

There must be some hidden technique behind it, Su Jie thought.

“Hey, Su Jie, are you tired? Want some water?”

Su Jie wasn't the only one with blistered hands. Next to him stood a foreigner, Josh, who also bore raw palms.

Josh was a tall, muscular man in his twenties, a British native who seemed to spend a lot of time in gyms. Like Su Jie, he had been keenly observing Gu Yang's techniques, diligently mimicking every move. His precision and speed in plowing were far better than Su Jie's.

Josh had come here specifically to learn Chinese martial arts. Two days ago, he and Su Jie joined the same short-term summer martial arts program and were assigned to share a dormitory.

In "D City", renowned as the cradle of martial arts, schools like Minglun Martial Arts Academy were everywhere. Among them, Minglun was one of the most prestigious, having produced numerous fighting champions, elite bodyguards, and martial arts stars over the years.

The academy's strong martial arts culture attracted a steady stream of foreigners eager to learn.

Nestled on the outskirts of a county town, the academy sat beside a bustling village that was often filled with foreign tourists carrying backpacks.

Josh's Chinese was poor, but his reverence for Chinese martial arts was unmistakable. He seemed to have picked up a lot of martial arts terminology, though it was unclear where he learned it. (G: Qiao Si to Joss to Josh.)

Josh had trained in various combat styles, including judo, Muay Thai, Krav Maga, Filipino stick fighting, and Russian Sambo. His specialty, however, was Jeet Kune Do, inspired by Bruce Lee. Yet he felt none of these were the ultimate fighting style, which led him to China in search of true martial arts.

Notably, Josh had adopted an eccentric appearance. His head was shaved, and he wore a gray monk's robe with a yellow silk sash tied around his waist, resembling a Western monk who had long since taken vows.

"Thanks," Su Jie said, taking the water Josh offered and gulping it down. Feeling refreshed, he asked in fluent English, "Josh, why are you always dressed like a monk?"

In his free time, Su Jie liked to chat with Josh in English to improve his conversational skills. Su Jie wasn't a troublemaker in school. On the contrary, he was a top student, admired by teachers and envied by parents as the quintessential "model child."

Their conversations over the past two days not only improved Su Jie's spoken English but also taught him a lot about combat techniques.

Originally, Su Jie had no interest in martial arts. His decision to enroll in the program stemmed from a humiliating incident, a moment of frustration, and a wager—to deal with someone.

"Oh, oh, oh!" Josh nodded vigorously, his bald head gleaming with sweat under the sun. "Wearing monk robes and shaving my head helps me get into the right mindset for training. When I practiced karate, I couldn't focus unless I wore the traditional white gi and belt. It clears my mind."

"Do you think digging soil counts as martial arts?" Su Jie shifted the topic.

“Of course!” Josh said, his sweaty bald head looking comically shiny as he replied mysteriously. “This must be a unique Chinese martial arts training method. In combat sports, we have two essential drills: smashing a tire with a sledgehammer and flipping tires. Do you know about them?”

“Yes,” Su Jie nodded. “I’ve seen fighters training with those on TV and online. They say it strengthens many muscle groups.”

“Exactly,” Josh continued, adjusting his posture to dig and turn soil.

“Hammering tires develops core stability and rotational explosiveness, while tire flipping trains full-body coordination and lower-body strength. What we’re doing now—digging and turning soil—does both. But it also exercises muscles and skills you can’t train with tires. Tires are unchanging objects, while soil is unpredictable. You never know if there’s a hard stone hidden beneath. When we thrust the hoe into the ground, we can’t just use brute force; we must first probe the ground’s firmness and make accurate judgments. The earth is like an opponent—you never know what move it’ll throw at you. Until you turn the soil, you won’t know what secrets lie beneath.”

“Josh, you actually know so much.” Su Jie was extremely shocked. He hadn’t expected that a foreigner could find so much philosophy from just farming.



“Before coming to study, I did detailed research on Chinese martial arts. I even learned Wing Chun,” Josh whispered, as if revealing a secret. His hands moved like a snake: “Snake Fist, Crane Fist!”

“Josh, you’re a bit of a show-off,” Su Jie almost laughed, but when he did, his abs hurt so much he winced in pain.

For the past few days, all his muscles ached from working.

“What does ‘show-off’ mean?” Josh looked puzzled.

“It means you’re pretty cool,” Su Jie replied, holding back his laughter.

“Whatever,” Josh flipped Su Jie off, “Do you think I’m dumb?”

“I also don’t get what this farming is supposed to teach—Coach Gu Yang never explained it.” Su Jie still wanted to get to the bottom of it; he had a determined mindset, always eager to think things through and learn new things.

“Amitabha, it’s Zen, martial monks, Qi Gong—something you have to understand yourself,” Josh leaned on his hoe, palms pressed together, making a dramatic gesture.

Unable to help himself, Su Jie returned the gesture.

“Two people per group, massage each other to relax, use joint oil to massage sore spots.”

Coach Gu Yang called for a break.

The trainees sighed in relief, quickly putting down their hoes and lying on plastic sheeting on the ground, massaging each other’s sore spots.

Josh and Su Jie were paired together.

“Su Jie, you look worn out, let me massage you first. Once you’re rested, you’ll help me,” Josh signaled Su Jie to lie down.

Su Jie was only too happy to oblige. At that moment, Josh took a “Minlun” joint oil out of his pocket, cracked the lid, releasing a strong, sharp smell. He poured some onto his hands and began massaging Su Jie’s back, legs, shoulders, arms, abdomen, knees, and soles—places that ached from the farming work.

The massage involved rubbing, kneading, pinching, and pressing.

The first hour on the first day of school was spent on this very technique—simple, easy to learn. After that, they went back to digging and tilling.

Once the joint oil was applied, it felt fiery, like chili water, but after a while, it became cool and soothing. Su Jie felt almost sleepy, completely relaxed.

This joint oil wasn’t commercially available; it was distributed by the school after enrollment. Rumor had it that it was a special recipe.

The founder of Minglun Martial Arts Academy, Liu Guanglie, was an old martial artist with a background in traditional Chinese medicine. He not only founded the school but also ran a TCM factory producing various injury medicines, all of which worked quite well.

Su Jie figured it was better than any commercial joint oil.

Without this joint oil, as a city boy, he would have already collapsed from exhaustion.

After thirty minutes, it was Josh's turn to lie down, and Su Jie took over.

By then, Su Jie had regained his strength.

"Training without drugs, sooner or later you'll collapse. Feels good..." Josh sighed deeply, speaking some stuttered Chinese martial proverb, "Chinese farmers are amazing. They work all day in the fields without joint oil massages and still manage to keep going for a lifetime."

“Josh, why did you come to China to learn martial arts? I see you’re a good fighter, and yet there’s never been a trace of Chinese martial arts in world combat events. Everyone says Chinese martial arts are a scam—they can’t fight. Are you still so faithful to them? Have you seen a true master?” Su Jie voiced his doubts while massaging Josh.

He had been at the martial school for two days and hadn’t seen any highly skilled martial artist. Was digging dirt and tilling land really useful for combat? Su Jie didn’t buy it, even if it meant enduring hardship.

“Competitions are one thing, street fights are another—they shouldn’t be mixed,” Josh got lost in thought. “I first learned Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, which is great for ground combat in matches. I even won a few local tournaments. But one day in a street fight, I locked a thug in a chokehold, and my head hit a street corner. I bled a lot. That’s when I realized Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is only suitable for the ring. In a chaotic street fight, you never know what might happen. I tried boxing, but got knocked out with a kick. Then I turned to Muay Thai and kickboxing, but once, I ran into a gang member who practiced Chinese martial arts, Hung Gar (also known as Hung Ga Kuen or Hongjiaquan). My techniques were better, but he was like a fierce tiger. I couldn’t handle his assault. That’s when I decided to study here.”

“Your practical fighting experience seems pretty extensive,” Su Jie noticed the numerous scars on Josh, from one-on-one fights to multiple opponents and street weapons.

“Josh, if I want to quickly improve my combat skills and win, what should I do?” Su Jie asked a crucial question while continuing the massage.