

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 2: Martial Arts Flourishing Locally, Adored Abroad

"Practice more actual combat," Josh said decisively. "Not the kind of sparring in a ring, but real street fights. When a ruthless enemy charges at you, none of your techniques will matter. Your mind goes blank, and the fight devolves into instinctive grappling and wild swinging. Only when you've trained to face such fierce opponents calmly can your techniques truly shine. Of course, you can start with sparring in the ring. What do you call this in your Chinese martial arts? Let me think."

He tapped his forehead and suddenly recalled, "Oh, it's called 'Courage first, strength second, and skill third.' Without courage, no technique can be executed properly."

"I only have two months. When the summer break ends, I have to go back to school. What can I possibly achieve in two months?" Su Jie eagerly absorbed knowledge and experience from Josh.

This often brawling foreigner not only helped Su Jie practice conversational English but also provided insights into fighting, helping him avoid unnecessary detours.

Josh had extensively studied Chinese martial arts and traveled across the ocean to learn more. His dedication and thirst for knowledge were qualities Su Jie admired and sought to emulate.

"Two months? Su Jie, you're joking, right?" Josh nearly jumped out of his seat. "You can't even build muscle in two months. I've been training for seven or eight years. Unless you take up shooting, where a bullet can solve many problems, there's really nothing I can do for you."

Su Jie remained silent, knowing full well that mastering combat and becoming an expert was impossible within such a short time frame.

Reality wasn't like novels or movies where consuming some magical pill or receiving decades of cultivation overnight would result in instant transformation.

"That guy has trained in various disciplines for years—kickboxing, wrestling, and general combat—and spends his days at the gym. Competing with him in the same field is impossible. But I can't let him keep harassing my sister," Su Jie thought, recalling his humiliation. This was why he chose to join a traditional martial arts class instead of combat-focused programs like kickboxing, Muay Thai, or mixed martial arts offered at other schools.

At Minglun Martial Arts Academy, there were plenty of combat training classes. In contrast, the traditional martial arts class rarely had any students, and those who did join were mostly foreigners.

"This really is a case of local treasures being valued abroad," Su Jie remarked.

The day's training involved digging and turning soil. During the last hour, Coach Gu Yang explained the precise posture for digging, flipping, pounding, lifting, and dropping. Beyond that, no combat techniques or martial arts moves were taught.

"Aren't we here to learn martial arts? When will we start combat training?" a student couldn't help but ask.

"I've told you how to earn money. Do I need to teach you how to spend it too?" Coach Gu Yang replied coldly, silencing the student.

Hearing this, Su Jie understood that Coach Gu Yang was likely only teaching methods to build strength. How to use that strength was something they'd have to figure out on their own.

It made sense. After all, this was a short-term martial arts training class, and no profound skills could be expected.

"Still, it's not useless. On the contrary, these digging and flipping exercises are very effective. Training like this for two months could significantly increase one's strength," Su Jie thought. "Maybe the coach will teach us more advanced techniques later?"

The day's practice ended.

All the students ran several kilometers back to the academy with Coach Gu Yang, exhausted and panting. After resting briefly in their dorms, they headed to the cafeteria for dinner. The academy's meals were decent and reasonably priced, with a variety of meat dishes available.

Of course, there were also special medicinal meals for nourishment, but they had to be pre-ordered and were quite expensive.

Su Jie instinctively checked his bank balance and ordered simple dishes instead. His family's financial situation wasn't great but wasn't bad either. His mother was a university professor, and his sister, Su Muchen, worked as an AI research expert in a large company, earning a high salary and occasionally giving him pocket money. His father, however, was a security team leader at a company, earning significantly less than his mother.

The disparity between his parents' professions often puzzled people as to how they ended up married. Su Jie had once asked his father about it but was scolded harshly, so he never brought it up again.

This time, Su Jie hadn't asked his parents for money. Instead, he used savings he'd earned by tutoring students.

Still in high school, Su Jie's excellent grades made him a sought-after tutor. Over the years, he had saved a considerable amount of pocket money. Frugal

by nature, he avoided spending on games, toys, or celebrity merchandise, unlike his peers.

However, enrolling in this training class cost an exorbitant 30,000 yuan for two months, nearly depleting his lifelong savings.

"Where's my ginseng milk chicken?" Josh called out, inviting Su Jie to join him in the VIP dining area.

The chef soon brought out a pot of milky soup containing ginseng, mushrooms, free-range chicken, vegetables, fresh fruits, and beef.

"This ginseng milk chicken would be better if it used wild ginseng—century-old or millennial ginseng would be ideal. It would greatly boost your strength! Especially the milk. If it were human milk, even better," Josh remarked, shaking his head in mild dissatisfaction.

"Didn't expect a foreigner like you to know Chinese recipes," the chef commented in Chinese. "But this dish costs just a thousand yuan. The ginseng is cultivated but high quality, aged six years. As for human milk, what do you think this is, the Qing dynasty?"

During the Qing dynasty, aristocrats drank human milk sourced from wet nurses, often mixed with sugar to create a nourishing tonic.

"There's a saying about strength coming from drinking milk. The longer a child is breastfed, the stronger they grow," the chef added.

"Josh, you actually believe this stuff? Cultivated ginseng and wild ginseng are virtually identical. Six-year-old ginseng is at its peak potency, with the most saponins. Centuries-old ginseng is mostly woody and nearly devoid of medicinal value. However, breast milk does surpass cow's milk in nutritional content. Babies raised on breast milk are indeed stronger and smarter than those fed cow's milk," Su Jie said, showcasing his knowledge from biology and history classes.

In addition to excelling academically, Su Jie had extensively explored extracurricular knowledge.

His physical education was also decent, with proficiency in running, high jump, long jump, rope skipping, shot put, javelin, and gymnastic apparatuses. While

not comparable to dedicated athletes, he fared much better than peers who spent their time gaming and lazing around.

Of course, the school didn't teach combat techniques, so Su Jie's understanding of martial arts and fighting was limited. He was now trying to make up for it.

"Alright, let's eat. I specifically ordered two servings today. It's more fun to eat together. I can't finish it all myself," Josh said, inviting Su Jie.

"Josh, you're treating me to a meal. Is there something you want my help with?" Su Jie asked, half-jokingly.

"Of course, to use you as a punching bag. I still have to train tonight!" Josh spoke quickly as he ate, his words muffled. "But I'm not taking advantage of you. This will benefit you too. Didn't you say you wanted to become a master in two months? While this training won't turn you into a martial arts master, it'll at least prepare you for basic combat."

"Why do I have to be your punching bag? I'm not your equal. Shouldn't you find someone closer to your level?" Su Jie asked curiously.

“No, no, no. It’s precisely because you’re weaker that I can control the situation. You’re like a moving target. If I spar with someone on my level, we’d both go all out and likely get injured. Remember, you should never get injured during training. Even professional fighters often suffer injuries while training. Recovery is hard, and it can end a career. On the contrary, real matches have professional referees, strict rules, and everyone exercises caution to avoid breaking the rules, so injuries are rare,” Josh explained seriously. “That’s why you must treat every training session seriously. Never push yourself through pain—it’s self-destructive.”

“Understood.” Su Jie nodded, taking the advice to heart.

“These chopsticks are so troublesome,” Josh muttered, struggling to pick up food. Awkwardly, he managed to grab a piece of chicken, only to drop it before it reached his mouth. Frustrated, he threw the chopsticks onto the floor.

“There are knives and forks here,” Su Jie quickly offered, pushing them toward him.

“You Chinese people are amazing, using such difficult utensils,” Josh said helplessly. He had tried to use chopsticks intentionally but couldn’t master them.

Although Josh was strong and physically gifted, chopsticks required finesse, not raw strength.

“We’re used to them since childhood. Naturally, we’re adept,” Su Jie replied but then fell silent, as though deep in thought.

“Why aren’t you talking?” Josh asked, his mouth still half-full.

“I was thinking. You Westerners are naturally stronger and use knives and forks. We Easterners, being physically weaker, rely on skill to compensate. Even cultural habits, like utensils, reflect this difference. It might reveal principles related to martial arts...” Su Jie’s thoughts showed a maturity beyond his years.

After finishing their meal, the two returned to their shared dorm. It was a simple double room without an en-suite bathroom, relying on communal facilities. The overall conditions weren’t great but weren’t terrible either.

To Su Jie, the accommodations felt unworthy of the tuition fees.

While Josh lay on the bed, Su Jie sat at the desk, writing in his diary. He summarized the day, reflected on areas for improvement, and noted lessons learned—a habit he had maintained since elementary school.

“July 2: Learned some digging techniques. Farming is much harder than I thought and requires methods of exerting force. According to Josh, this is a fundamental training method in traditional martial arts. I think that’s plausible. In ancient China, farmers faced harsh conditions, did heavy labor, and often dealt with local disputes. History books provide many examples of violent clashes over resources like water. These situations required physical strength and survival skills. In those times, even a chicken or a few pounds of grain were vital assets. Families without men capable of work and self-defense often fell prey to bullies or thieves. In contrast, families with strong men skilled in martial arts could live well. It was a necessity, not a choice.”

“Josh emphasized that real combat experience builds courage. I agree. It’s like taking exams—no matter how good you are at solving problems, if you don’t practice under test conditions, you might panic and forget everything. I’ve experienced that before. Combat is no different.”

“My next steps are to master digging techniques, learn how to apply them, practice fighting, and protect myself from injury. Overcome fear, build courage. Su Jie, you’ve got this!”

After completing his diary entry, Su Jie took a deep breath and felt invigorated. At sixteen or seventeen, his resilience was strong.

He added one more note: “Practice more English conversations with Josh to improve my speaking skills.”