

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 6: Subtle Perception Eating and Sleeping as Meditation

"How can eating and sleeping be part of cultivation?"

Su Jie asked, puzzled.

"The two most important things in life are eating and sleeping," Odell replied. "Once, someone asked an enlightened Zen master, 'What is Zen?' The master answered, 'When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep.' The person found it strange and asked, 'But isn't that what everyone does? Why is it Zen for you but not for others?' The Zen master explained, 'Because when they eat, they are not truly eating, and when they sleep, they are not truly sleeping.' Do you understand the meaning of this story?"

"When eating, one is not truly eating. When sleeping, one is not truly sleeping," Su Jie repeated, pondering the profound philosophy. He vaguely understood but couldn't quite grasp the specifics.

As he was reflecting, the sound of a motorcycle came from outside the courtyard.

Odell opened the gate, revealing a food delivery worker.

Several large bags were brought in and placed on the table. The spread was extravagant: beef, chicken, fruits, dairy products, fish, and soup. It was clearly not ordinary takeout but custom-made dishes.

Once the delivery person had set everything up, Odell gestured to Su Jie, "Come and eat. This is private cuisine from the Nie family. It's said their ancestors were imperial chefs. I tried it once before and found it incredibly delicious. It also nourishes the body and replenishes vitality—suitable for all ages."

Su Jie's stomach was already growling, but a hint of embarrassment showed on his face. He felt like he was freeloading.

Odell seemed to see through his thoughts. "I'm conducting a physical fitness training experiment. If you're willing to volunteer, I'll cover your meals and even pay you."

"Of course, I'm willing!" Su Jie nodded quickly. "Just covering my meals is enough—I don't even need the pay. Could you teach me more martial arts instead?"

"Then let's eat first." Odell pointed with his chopsticks.

Westerners are usually accustomed to eating with knives and forks, and many struggle to use chopsticks. Su Jie tried his best to handle the chopsticks but failed every time. Odell, however, was entirely different. He wielded the chopsticks with fluid ease, even skillfully picking up difficult-to-grab peanuts, selecting precisely how many he wanted.

Su Jie, famished, took a big bite.

Odell immediately stopped him. "Eating is your first lesson from me. You must chew thoroughly, breaking down the food completely before swallowing. While eating, don't think about anything else. Focus solely on the act of eating. But don't be too tense—maintain a mindset of enjoyment and relaxation. Remember, eating is one of the most relaxing and enjoyable moments of life. Grasp this moment, and you grasp the essence of life. This is what the Zen master meant by 'when eating, eat.' Most people—99%, in fact—aren't truly eating when they eat."

"Focus without distraction, yet enjoy and relax. Chew thoroughly," Su Jie muttered. He recalled what he had learned in biology class: thorough chewing helps secrete more saliva, converting starches into maltose and reducing the digestive burden on the stomach. The more you chew, the more facial muscle movement stimulates the cerebral cortex, enhancing brain activity.

"Eating with the right mindset is crucial. If you think about other things while eating, blood circulation won't focus on your stomach and intestines, which weakens your digestion. At the same time, it reduces the brain's control over your taste buds. Over time, this can lead to mild anorexia. From an evolutionary perspective, this marks the beginning of species elimination," said Odell. "In my research, even professional athletes who eat without thinking outperform those who think while eating. Don't underestimate this detail—true physical fitness and body quality stem from such strict self-discipline and mental control. The devil is often hidden in the details."

"The devil is hidden in the details." Hearing this, Su Jie seemed to grasp the concept. He wanted to think further but stopped immediately, focusing on eating and enjoying the food.

As he ate, he entered a state where he felt the aroma of the food spread throughout his body with each chew, leaving him slightly euphoric. The well-chewed food traveled down his esophagus into his stomach, bringing an overwhelming sense of satisfaction.

During this, he felt nature's gift to life.

Observing Su Jie's state and his expression change while eating, Odell looked as though he had discovered a treasure—like a teacher finding a highly perceptive student.

After finishing his meal, Su Jie instinctively wanted to stand up.

"Don't stand yet. After eating, sit for a while because your stomach and intestines are still digesting. If you disrupt this process by standing, your stomach might sag. However, sitting for too long can lead to bloating. In this case, you should drink something to aid digestion," Odell continued to share his detailed knowledge.

"A drink?" Su Jie didn't find any juices or similar beverages but had eaten some fruit at the table.

"The best drink is your saliva," Odell said, gently massaging his abdomen in sync with his breathing. "There are several points on the abdomen. In Chinese medicine, these points are unique and fascinating. In our scientific terms, they are called sensitive areas where neurons concentrate. Massage these points—such as Zhongwan, Daheng, Tianshu, Qihai, and Daimai—gently and in order. While doing this, stimulate saliva secretion and swallow it. This helps your stomach and intestines digest more efficiently. It's one of the small details in Chinese martial arts and a health-preserving technique that aligns with scientific principles. Continue until you no longer feel bloated or sense any discomfort in your stomach and abdomen."

Su Jie followed along, learning as he went. He hadn't expected something as simple as eating to involve so much knowledge. Instead of dismissing these details, he valued them deeply and resolved to implement them diligently.

Once digestion was complete, Odell finally allowed him to stand and move.

In the courtyard, Odell had Su Jie walk slowly around the yard. After an hour, when the food was thoroughly digested, he let Su Jie practice the "Hoe Strike" move again.

This time, Odell gave meticulous guidance, correcting every incorrect detail on the spot. Only when Su Jie had mastered the move with precision and steadiness did he stop.

"It's time for a nap."

Seeing that Su Jie was somewhat fatigued, Odell guided him on how to rest. The courtyard had annexed rooms, a traditional architectural style specifically for hosting guests.

Odell instructed Su Jie to lie on the bed in a spread-eagle position, stretching his head and limbs as if being pulled apart.

"What I'm teaching you now is derived from ancient Indian yoga and Tantric life-death cessation methods, called the Great Corpse State. I've made minor adjustments to it. Lie flat on the bed with your head, hands, and feet stretched outward as much as possible. Imagine you're being torn apart by horses, at your limits, struggling to resist but eventually powerless. Imagine being quartered and feeling as though you've died. Though you're actually still alive, you'll feel an unparalleled calm. At this moment, you are like a corpse—your senses remain, but you experience life anew. By dying once and still being alive, you can let go of everything. Everything becomes serene, and you'll achieve ultimate relaxation."

Odell's voice seemed to carry a hypnotic quality. Following his rhythm, Su Jie stretched his limbs and head forcefully. Suddenly, it felt as though he had truly died. Yet, just like that, he fell into a peaceful sleep, breathing steadily and deeply.

"Among the students I've seen, this child has the best aptitude and intellect. He's calm, not impulsive, and has a strong sense of justice. But to get into the state so

quickly... Could he truly be a genius?" Odell thought as he observed the sleeping Su Jie. The reason Su Jie had caught his attention was due to the small incident of buying water.

This minor event fully showcased Su Jie's wisdom and sense of justice.

In their subsequent conversations, Odell discerned Su Jie's persistence, strong will, and comprehension. Ordinary people would find it difficult to persevere, even with guidance. Moreover, during their discussion, he realized that Su Jie was a person with strong execution and planning skills.

"Most importantly, someone who can enter the state of the Great Corpse on their first try is one in a million. Yet he managed it? He directly understood how to live in the state of a corpse. At this rate, he might achieve a state of transcending life and death—an extraordinary spiritual condition. This kind of mental training isn't something artificial intelligence can replicate." A smile appeared on Odell's face.

After two hours of sleep, Su Jie woke up naturally, feeling completely refreshed. He had never felt this comfortable before. His mind was light and carefree, as if he could let go of everything and be content with anything, enjoying a constant sense of ease and joy.

"There's one thing I need you to promise me," Odell said. "Don't tell anyone about my training for now. Set aside time every day to train secretly. Also, if the opportunity arises in the future, I hope you'll participate in a few martial arts tournaments and acknowledge me as your coach."

“Okay,” Su Jie nodded after thinking about it.

Odell seemed pleased, as if his plan had succeeded, smiling faintly.

“What I taught you today, take your time to understand and digest. Following this training will benefit you for life. But to truly learn martial arts, this is far from enough. Here’s the plan: come here every day if you have time to train. I’ll only be here for a month, and after that, I’ll be leaving.” Odell waved his hand dismissively.

Su Jie didn’t ask further about martial arts.

The knowledge he had gained today was enough to keep him busy for days.

“July 8. I had the fortune of meeting Odell, a coach of world-class martial artists. He shared with me a wealth of knowledge about traditional martial arts, opening up a completely new world for me.

“When practicing, one must cultivate the hatred of not having a weapon in hand or a ring underfoot and the fierce determination to fight without retreating until one’s opponent bleeds. Even more fascinating is the mentality of the Great Corpse State—to live as though one were a corpse, finding one’s truest self.

“I feel peaceful and content, as if I’ve discovered the true meaning of life through this training. Traditional martial arts and cultivation methods are truly miraculous. Whether or not they involve supernatural powers, they are undoubtedly a purification of the body and soul. It’s no wonder that throughout history, many have retreated to deep mountains and forests to cultivate themselves.”

“Tonight, I’ll continue sparring with Josh. He still easily lands hits on me. Learning from Coach Odell hasn’t instantly made me invincible. It seems martial arts require steady progress rather than sudden leaps. Before bed, I’ll continue practicing the Great Corpse State.

“From my online research, the Great Corpse State originates from esoteric Buddhist meditation, while the addition of the Five-Horse Dismemberment concept by Coach Odell likely symbolizes a stretching and bone-strengthening practice.

“Another aspect he emphasized was that even eating should involve a set of digestive massages and swallowing techniques. By incorporating health-preserving details into every aspect of life, one’s physical condition will improve significantly. Life’s two most important activities—eating and sleeping—consume a vast amount of time. It’s essential to master these details.”

“Su Jie, remember: success is determined by the details. Never forget this.”

As per his daily routine, Su Jie recorded everything in his diary, reflecting and summarizing his experiences.

Chapter 7: Three Training Methods Internal Training, Combat Training, and Endurance Training

On the early morning of July 9th, at only three o'clock, Su Jie was already up.

He had gone to bed at nine the previous night, falling asleep using the “Great Corpse State” of relaxation taught by Coach Odell. Gradually, he entered an extremely tranquil state.

Though he had only slept for six hours, he felt more energized than when he usually slept for ten. When he woke up, Su Jie felt completely refreshed.

He quickly washed up and headed to the small courtyard outside the school, where Odell lived.

Odell seemed to have anticipated his arrival. Reclining on a grand chair, he gazed at the clouds leisurely drifting across the sky. The summer dawn was truly pleasant—a cool breeze swept through, and the courtyard, likely treated with some insect repellent, was completely free of mosquitoes.

“You’re here earlier than I expected,” Odell remarked, a hint of surprise in his eyes. “I assume you slept well last night?”

“I slept like a log,” Su Jie said, feeling an abundance of energy coursing through him. “Coach, what are we learning today?”

“I’ll start by teaching you a set of joint exercises.” Odell stood up and demonstrated a few movements. “Before any training, warming up is crucial. Among warm-ups, joint mobility is the most important. Of all the joints, the knees and wrists are the most fragile and prone to injury. Protecting them while strengthening them is essential. Boxers, for instance, always wrap their wrists to avoid wrist injuries while hitting the punching bag. They also use knee braces. Ideally, you should also apply a muscle-relaxing balm when doing joint exercises. The various medications from Minglun Martial Arts Academy are quite effective.”

Su Jie followed Odell in performing the joint exercises.

The movements were smooth, gentle, and slow, resembling Tai Chi to some extent.

“Coach, is this a new style of Tai Chi?” Su Jie asked as he moved. Gradually, his entire body began to heat up, especially his joints, which felt exceptionally comfortable. His brain even experienced a subtle sense of exhilaration.

“All exercises share one fundamental benefit—they stimulate the release of dopamine and endorphins in the body,” Odell explained. “Dopamine excites and motivates, creating a sense of accomplishment, while endorphins act as natural painkillers. Dopamine is particularly significant, as it improves the body’s

endocrine system and keeps a person in a state of euphoria. It can treat depression, anxiety, and various mental illnesses. That's why exercise is the ultimate stress reliever.

"I've studied all forms of exercise, and I've found that the slow, continuous, and aerobic rhythm of Tai Chi generates more dopamine than any other activity. People who practice Tai Chi often feel a profound sense of comfort. Over time, this can lead to an irrational confidence in their abilities, which explains why some Tai Chi masters get defeated in real combat. This phenomenon, described in Zen Buddhism as an illusory state, must be overcome to recognize one's true self and reach a new level of understanding."

"So that's how it is." Su Jie suddenly understood. "Ever since I learned that digging-and-hoe movement, I've practiced it day and night, thinking I was invincible, only to get beaten up by others. Is it because my brain produces too much dopamine during exercise, creating an illusion of omnipotence? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?"

"It's definitely a good thing. The fact that you can quickly get into an excited state indicates your natural talent for physical activity," Odell replied. "Many people feel more tired as they exercise, leading to a sense of laziness. But you get addicted to it, which shows your aptitude and understanding."

Seeing how quickly Su Jie learned the joint exercises, Odell became even more pleased.

"This set of joint exercises combines modern combat training systems with traditional Chinese martial arts, including the Shaolin Muscle-Tendon Change

Classic, Five Animal Frolics, Tai Chi, and yoga. It's scientifically designed to maximize effectiveness," Odell continued. "Traditional Chinese martial arts, in terms of their patterns of movement, produce unparalleled levels of dopamine compared to other forms of exercise."

"Coach, I feel really energized now," Su Jie said after an hour of gentle exercise that felt no different from seniors practicing Tai Chi in the park. Yet he felt as though he could take down a tiger, with his brain fully activated.

"That's exactly how a warm-up should feel," Odell nodded. "When your brain is exhilarated from physical activity, that's when the warm-up ends. Next, we'll move on to real combat training and endurance training."

"Combat training? Endurance training?" It was the first time Su Jie had heard these terms.

"Martial arts training consists of three methods: internal training, combat training, and endurance training," Odell explained. "Internal training focuses on nurturing the body, such as stretching, meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, and martial arts routines. It's relaxing, easy to pick up, and suitable for everyone.

"Combat training, on the other hand, involves activities like weightlifting, punching bags, sprinting, and target kicking to strengthen muscles and bones.

“Endurance training is the harshest. It includes sparring and actual combat, as well as grueling methods like stick-beating and body conditioning to enhance toughness and endurance. However, this method is only suitable for young people. Overdoing it after thirty can lead to injuries. The process must be carefully managed to avoid permanent damage. Nutrition and medicinal support are essential to prevent hidden injuries.

“This type of endurance training yields results quickly. Examples include Muay Thai, traditional Japanese karate, and Chinese hard-style practices like iron palm, iron finger, and hard Qi Gong. Today, only elite combat athletes and special forces soldiers undergo such training. Of course, I’ve developed the most scientific approach to endurance training.”

At this point, Odell paused, his face showing an expression unique to a beast trainer. "The upcoming training will be harsh, even brutal. If you can’t endure it, you can quit. However, if you do, I won’t teach you anything in the future. Think it through carefully."

"I’m willing to accept it," Su Jie agreed without hesitation.

"There’s a hoe over there. Go get it," Odell said, pointing to the side.

Su Jie quickly fetched the hoe and stood in position according to the stance he practiced yesterday. Holding the hoe in the middle, it seemed neither raised nor lowered.

Yesterday, he stood empty-handed, but now, holding the hoe made it much more strenuous.

Still, the days of practice had built some muscle on Su Jie.

After all, he had spent several days digging soil before feasting with Josh.

"Stand properly. Imagine someone is pulling your hair upward, lifting your head. Your hips should sink as if sitting on a scorching piece of iron, too hot to stay still, making you constantly want to adjust. Your feet should root into the ground like a tree planting its roots deep into the soil. The deeper the roots, the harder it is for the wind to topple you. Envision yourself as a tiger, with prey in front of you, gathering strength and ready to deliver a fatal strike at any moment. If you miss, you'll go hungry..."

After Su Jie assumed the stance, Odell gave constant instructions.

Then, he picked up a rubber stick in his hand.

Whack!

Without warning, he struck Su Jie's calf.

Su Jie couldn't help but let out a muffled grunt, immediately focusing his strength in that area. The pain slightly subsided.

Whap! Whap!

Odell continued striking Su Jie's body with the rubber stick. Before long, Su Jie was covered in bruises. The intense pain was unbearable, yet he gritted his teeth and endured.

"Now, start moving," Odell instructed. "Attack me with the hoe."

"Alright." Su Jie used a digging motion, swinging the hoe forcefully in a fierce attack.

However, Odell's movements were too fast. No matter how much Su Jie tried, he couldn't even touch the hem of his clothing.

Each of Su Jie's attacks was met with a strike from the rubber stick.

Several times, Su Jie wanted to quit. The training was too hard and exhausting. He wanted to throw down the hoe and give up. But a deep-seated determination kept him going.

"Stop!" Just as Su Jie felt like he was about to pass out, Odell called a halt. He applied liniment to the bruised areas of Su Jie's body and began massaging them.

The massage felt like a knife slicing through his flesh, leaving him in excruciating pain.

However, after half an hour of Odell's massage, much of the bruising dissipated.

"When my hand massages a spot, focus your strength there to alleviate the pain. That's the secret to hard-body training. It's about channeling energy to withstand impacts. The principle is simple: use your mind to control a specific body part and tense it up. Always stay alert. When anything touches a part of your body, that part should immediately tense up. Be ready to react to the slightest movement. This is what ancient martial arts manuals mean by 'a feather cannot land, and a fly cannot settle.' It's also called immediate response upon contact.

"I strike you to train this instinct, to enhance your sensitivity and resilience. The areas I strike are all nerve-sensitive spots. Remember, never train like this with someone else because they might not know how to control their strength and could seriously injure you. Only I, a world-class top-level martial arts coach, can precisely control the force."

Odell's method of striking seemed scientifically designed to enhance certain circulatory functions in the body.

"Alright, let's have breakfast now."

Odell led Su Jie to the kitchen, where a hearty meal awaited. There was hot, steaming porridge, buns, milk, eggs, several plates of fruits, jam, fish, and more.

Su Jie was famished, feeling like he could eat an entire cow.

Even so, he ate slowly and deliberately.

After finishing his meal, he followed Odell's digestion routine, massaging several acupuncture points on his abdomen and swallowing saliva. Half an hour later, he was full of energy again.

"Now we'll start strength and body training," Odell announced. "Heel raises, planks, skipping rope, push-ups, crunches, leg kicks, and stretching exercises..."

Hearing this, Su Jie knew this was yet another grueling training session—focused on martial training.

In the morning, joint exercises served as soft training. The rubber stick striking was for hard-body training. What came next was martial training, aimed at building explosive power and physical strength.

By the end of the morning, Su Jie had trained from three in the morning until six. Only then did he rush back to the academy, just in time to join Gu Yang's training.

Chapter 8: The Movement of Shouldering Like a Dragon's Coil

"Su Jie, where did you go this morning? You were up even earlier than me," Josh asked curiously.

"I went for a run," Su Jie replied, not intending to deceive but simply following Odell's instructions to keep quiet.

"Today is the ninth day." Gu Yang gathered a group of people on the field and began his speech. "You came here to learn traditional martial arts. For the past seven days, I've had you dig soil, which you might think is useless. But in the future, you'll understand—this is the foundation of all martial arts. Today, I will teach you another genuine martial art!"

As he spoke, he pointed to a corner of the field where many baskets and carrying poles were placed.

The baskets were filled with rice, cooking oil, and salt, all heavy items. Each basket weighed about sixty or seventy jin.

“These supplies are for elderly villagers in need,” Gu Yang explained, gesturing to the baskets filled with essentials. “Now, each of you will take a pole and follow me to the countryside. But carrying these loads requires skill; it’s not just about brute strength.”

He demonstrated by walking over to the heaviest pair of baskets, setting the pole across them, and slipping under it. With a smooth motion, his body dipped, and then with a flick of his waist, the pole and baskets rose steadily, producing a creaking sound. He carried the load effortlessly.

“This dipping, lifting, and thrusting contains profound technique. It’s similar to the force used in digging with a hoe but with even greater upward strength, like a blade of grass breaking through the soil to overturn a stone,” Su Jie observed, amazed. With his growing understanding of martial arts, he could see the deep martial technique embedded in the act of carrying a pole.

An ordinary person, attempting this recklessly, might easily injure their back.

“I’ll try.” Josh, being tall and sturdy, stepped forward confidently. He positioned himself under the pole and lifted the baskets with effort. However, as soon as he took a few steps, the load became unbalanced. The pole tilted, one basket heavy,

the other light, and everything slid off, spilling the contents.

Fortunately, the rice was bagged, and the oil was sealed in plastic containers, so nothing was wasted. Josh stubbornly rearranged everything and tried again. He managed to lift the pole and baskets but struggled to maintain balance.

He resembled the central beam of a scale, desperately trying to keep both sides level—a nearly impossible task. Standing still was manageable, but moving was a different story.

In the past, Su Jie might have dismissed the idea that carrying a pole had any value. But now, with Odell's teachings, he realized that carrying poles and digging soil were both forms of martial arts.

Gu Yang was genuinely imparting advanced techniques.

Odell's detailed explanation of "The Hoe Technique" had provided Su Jie with many insights. He watched Gu Yang's actions closely, comparing them to Josh's clumsy attempts.

Despite Josh's physical strength, his lack of experience in farm labor showed. Tasks like carrying poles and digging soil seemed simple but were incredibly demanding over time.

The students in the training program imitated Gu Yang, picking up poles and following him out of the academy.

After walking a kilometer, their faces twisted in pain, their shoulders rubbed raw, and their backs and spines ached unbearably under the weight.

This was far more difficult than digging soil.

“When carrying the pole, match your steps to the rhythm of your breathing. Move in a rise-and-fall motion, coordinating your entire body to toss the load slightly off your shoulders. This allows temporary relaxation. As the load comes back down, use your shoulders to absorb the impact, transferring the force to your legs. Watch my movements,” Gu Yang instructed.

He moved with ease, his steps light and quick. The heavy load swayed gently on his shoulders, as if weightless, like a butterfly flitting about.

Su Jie, with his sharp understanding of martial arts, immediately grasped the secrets of the technique.

This was indeed a martial art.

First came the dipping motion to get under the pole. This move was highly strategic, resembling a boxer's lower dodge but far more advanced. It could be used to attack an opponent's lower body while reducing one's vulnerability.

Then came the upward lift to raise the heavy load. This upward thrust combined the strength of the waist, legs, and spine in a coordinated effort.

While walking, the body adjusted to the swaying of the load. The technique relied on tension and relaxation to control the movement, akin to a parabolic toss rather than a steady carry.

This method not only prevented muscle strain but also stretched the tendons, trained balance, and enhanced physical resilience. Carrying a load of over a hundred jin while keeping it steady required extraordinary balance—without it, one would topple immediately.

'The wisdom of the ancients is truly astonishing. Their understanding of physical movement reached unparalleled heights. Even in farm labor, profound martial techniques can be discovered,' Su Jie thought as he carried the pole.

He gradually found his rhythm and, to his surprise, didn't feel as fatigued.

"I can't go on, I need a break." After walking out of the academy and covering about a kilometer, Josh was already exhausted like a dead dog. He walked up to Su Jie, dropped the load he was carrying, and panted heavily while rubbing his

shoulders and waist. His gaze was peculiar as he asked, "Why aren't you tired? Have you done farm work before?"

"No, I haven't, but I've used some techniques," Su Jie replied, demonstrating to Josh by shifting the load. "The technique is about rhythm. When you lift the load slightly, there's a moment where your whole body can relax. During that brief second, you can regulate your breathing and relax your muscles. Once you master the rhythm, it feels like you're resting half the time."

This skill was something he had learned from Odell about balancing relaxation and tension.

"It's only been a day, and you seem like a completely different person. Did you learn some martial arts from someone, or were you given decades' worth of energy transfer?" Josh asked in clumsy Chinese.

"What are you talking about? Do you think I'm in a novel where someone transfers decades of skills to me?" Su Jie couldn't help but laugh at Josh. On the fighting stage, Su Jie wouldn't stand a chance against Josh, but when it came to farm work, he clearly had the upper hand.

The training class participants spent the whole day carrying loads.

Everyone's faces showed signs of agony. Even those with a martial arts foundation found it unbearable.

However, Su Jie had mastered the up-and-down rhythm. While it was tiring at first, he eventually found carrying loads increasingly manageable. He felt that each time the load came down, it was like forging steel, toughening his muscles and bones.

"If you carry loads without proper technique, it's easy to injure your spine, strain your back muscles, or even damage your joints. But with the right method, it can train many parts of your body. Compared to weighted squats, deadlifts, or bench presses, this trains far more areas. Plus, while walking, you also develop balance. Imagine this: if you can carry heavy loads and still move swiftly, what would happen when you set the load down and face an opponent?" Gu Yang explained to the group during the lesson. "Don't be fooled by your good diet and rest; you're far weaker than the farmers of ancient times when it comes to hard labor like this."

In the countryside, after delivering grains and oil to elderly villagers, everyone was completely exhausted, including Josh. Su Jie, however, had thoroughly mastered the rhythm of relaxation and tension. Though his shoulders were raw, he hadn't run out of stamina.

He seemed to have grasped the essence of Gu Yang's method.

"Now gather the vegetables and carry them back too," Gu Yang instructed.

The group was in the countryside delivering essentials to elderly villagers and collecting vegetables they had grown, which the academy's cafeteria had purchased. The elderly were deeply grateful.

Normally, they had to carry the vegetables to town themselves, but with the students coming directly to collect them, it saved them a lot of effort.

Watching the elders express their gratitude, Su Jie felt a warm sense of fulfillment. He believed he had done something meaningful, which made him feel content.

On the way back, as they carried the heavy vegetables, a tall man suddenly lost his temper.

He cursed and complained in English, "What kind of training is this? I came here to learn martial arts, Chinese martial arts, not to do farm work! You had us digging for seven days; now, do we have to carry loads for another seven days?"

The man, Boone, was an American.

He was tall, burly, and built like a giant, even bigger than Josh in terms of frame and arm span. Boone had enrolled in the martial arts class to learn Chinese martial arts. However, the nine days of grueling training had tested his patience, and today he finally snapped.

Boone stormed up to Gu Yang, looking menacing. "Refund me. I'm quitting."

Seeing this, Su Jie quickly stepped forward to stop him, but Josh held him back.

The other participants watched closely. They, too, seemed disgruntled. After all, they had come to learn martial arts, not to do farm work. For those who didn't understand, resentment was inevitable.

Even Su Jie initially had doubts. But after meeting Odell, his doubts were dispelled. He realized Gu Yang's training was truly a sophisticated form of martial arts, though it was misunderstood by most.

"Fine. When we get back, go to the academy's finance office, and they'll process your refund," Gu Yang replied, surprisingly fluent in English with a British accent. His response caught Boone off guard.

Still, Boone maintained his aggressive stance and even assumed a fighting posture. "You wasted ten days of my time. I demand compensation ten times the amount. I paid \$5,000 in tuition, so I want \$50,000. Otherwise, I'll beat you up as punishment for your deceit."

Just as Boone bounced on his feet, preparing to strike with a boxer's stance, Gu Yang moved.

In an instant, he lunged forward as if aiming for Boone's lower body. Startled, Boone instinctively stepped back. But at that moment, Gu Yang surged upward and struck Boone's face and chest.

Thud!

The towering Boone was sent sprawling to the ground, rolling several times. He struggled briefly before sitting up, dazed and speechless.

Chapter 9: Time Flies, Rapid Progress Achieved

Almost no one could see how Gu Yang made his move.

They only saw Gu Yang's figure dart forward, instantly appearing in front of Boone, tearing through his defense, and sending him flying.

"Amazing! So that's how it's used," Su Jie thought excitedly. He had already figured it out—Gu Yang had just used the "Digging and Hoeing" move, while his footwork resembled "Carrying the Load." With the power of "Carrying the Load," the "Digging and Hoeing" move gained penetration, enabling him to send his opponent flying.

In fact, both techniques were closely connected.

Boone was left dazed from the hit. It took him five minutes to get up from the ground. All his earlier ferocity was gone, and he didn't mention compensation anymore. He quietly started carrying loads.

Gu Yang, on the other hand, acted as if nothing had happened and continued carrying his loads back to the school.

“Amazing! That was incredible!”

Back at the school, during dinner, Josh was wolfing down his food while discussing the scene with Su Jie. However, Su Jie, calm and composed, was eating slowly and silently, savoring his meal. This left Josh feeling disheartened.

After a while, Su Jie finished eating, sat down to massage his stomach, and swallowed his saliva. Only after the feeling of fullness completely subsided did he stand up and start speaking.

“Where did you learn this way of eating?” Josh asked curiously.

“It's an ancient health regimen I found online. Do you want to learn it? It's said to help fully digest food and boost stamina,” Su Jie replied, strictly adhering to Coach Odell's advice not to reveal too much.

“Sounds amazing, but it’s too much trouble. My digestion is great—I don’t need all that,” Josh shook his head, uninterested. “Let’s go. After a short break, we’ll train with the sandbag as usual.”

Josh treated Su Jie as his moving sandbag every day, finding it increasingly enjoyable. Lately, he had noticed Su Jie’s speed and strength improving, which made his “sandbag” even more valuable.

Back in the dormitory, Su Jie wrote in his diary as usual:

[July 9: I learned so much today. Besides a set of joint exercises for warm-ups, Coach Odell trained me in horizontal strength, teaching me to control my muscles and skin, alternating between relaxation and tension. Then Gu Yang showed us how to "Carry the Load." This move can even be applied in combat—Boone, that tall guy, had no chance to fight back!

It proves that Chinese martial arts are real, not just exaggerated tales. After all, China has thousands of years of warfare and self-defense techniques passed down through history—they couldn’t all be fake.

Coach Odell’s advice on eating and sleeping habits must be strictly followed without any slack. As the saying goes, success lies in the details. Su Jie, you will definitely become a master! Believe in yourself!]

That evening, Su Jie trained with Josh as usual. During their sparring, Su Jie tried to find opportunities to execute the "Hoeing" move but discovered it was nearly impossible. Several attempts failed, and instead, Josh took advantage of the openings, landing numerous punches on him. Fortunately, with three layers of protective gear on, Su Jie avoided any major injuries.

“This move definitely has combat potential, just like sweeping kicks, straight punches, or hooks. The challenge is seizing the right moment, executing precise bursts of power, and improving speed. I lack in all these areas. After all, it’s only my ninth day practicing martial arts—making this much progress is already a miracle.”

After returning from training, Su Jie diligently recorded his insights in his diary before going to bed. Using the "Corpse Spread" sleeping method, he quickly entered a state of deep calm.

“Gu Yang is an excellent coach.”

July 10.

As usual, Su Jie woke up at 3 a.m., heading to Coach Odell’s small courtyard outside the school. While performing joint exercises similar to Tai Chi, he reported yesterday’s training under Gu Yang to Coach Odell.

Odell nodded repeatedly after hearing this, "Starting with the posture of carrying a pole, this is the most crucial aspect of the martial arts fist techniques. Carrying a pole isn't easy; it requires strength and the coordination of the whole body to initiate the movement. On flat ground, it's manageable, but on rugged mountain paths or muddy terrain, the martial arts skill truly shines. If this technique is applied to combat, it would be terrifying. In traditional martial arts, this is called integrated power; in modern combat, it's referred to as full-body coordination. Whether it's Judo, Muay Thai, mixed martial arts, or free combat, all emphasize this principle. However, Chinese martial arts integrate this into farming tasks, making every movement in daily life an exercise—this is profound philosophy."

Odell continued, "The starting motion of the hoe-and-mattock move is like carrying a pole. You can experience it in detail later. But for now, start with warm-ups and proceed to horizontal conditioning!"

Smack!

A rubber stick struck Su Jie's back, leaving a burning pain that was almost unbearable. However, Su Jie remained motionless, using his willpower to sense the struck areas, training his muscles to tense and relax alternately.

While striking, Odell explained, "The foundation of horizontal conditioning is developing a sensitivity to your body's muscles, skin, and fascia. Your thoughts must trigger responses from every part of your body simultaneously—this is the sensation of Qi flowing through the entire body. Once you grasp this, you can train on your own. This will greatly enhance your physical abilities," Odell said. "Globally, every form of exercise—whether it's ancient yoga, Chinese martial arts, or even religious prayer and practice—faces this fundamental challenge. In

Chinese Daoist martial arts, it's called opening the small and large circulation paths. Yoga refers to it as chakra alignment. In religious circles, it's described as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Modern science simplifies it to the brain's complete control over all body neurons. It may not sound mystical, but the training is exceedingly difficult. Without a superb coach, it's nearly impossible to master on your own."

Su Jie listened quietly, taking mental notes to write in his journal later and research further.

The biggest advantage of learning from Odell was the ability to use modern neuroscience, psychology, kinesiology, and anatomy to clearly explain the seemingly mystical elements of traditional martial arts and Chinese martial arts.

Holding a heavy hoe, Su Jie took a stance while Odell struck various parts of his body with a rubber stick.

Odell's techniques were ingenious—while the strikes caused excruciating pain, they didn't inflict severe internal injuries. Instead, they significantly enhanced Su Jie's vitality and bone strength. Combined with medicinal treatments and a nutritional diet, Su Jie recovered quickly.

In terms of diet, Odell prepared excellent meals for Su Jie.

It seemed Odell was determined to nurture a world-class athlete to prove he could rival artificial intelligence.

The morning passed like this: first theoretical training, then horizontal conditioning, followed by meals and rest, and finally martial arts practice.

Later, Su Jie returned to the academy.

As dawn broke, Coach Gu Yang's training session began.

Gu Yang's training was straightforward. For the first seven days, it was digging and turning soil. For the next seven days, it involved carrying loads to the countryside.

This training was monotonous and entirely uninteresting. Without the deeper insights gained from Odell, Su Jie might have felt it was a waste of time and, like Boone, grown complacent. But now, the more he trained, the more intriguing it became.

At night, he continued to serve as Josh's punching bag. Occasionally, he retaliated with a couple of punches, but his combat skills still lagged far behind Josh's.

Su Jie didn't mind—he was content as long as he steadily improved.

His journal documented his daily progress:

[July 10th: Training continued as usual—no significant changes, but it was tough. Thankfully, Coach Odell's breakfast was delicious and highly nutritious; I ate a lot. The breakfast was ordered from Nie's Private Kitchen in town, which is said to be very expensive and inaccessible to most people. According to Coach Odell, this city is full of hidden masters. He came here to learn traditional knowledge from some of them. There's a thousand-year-old temple in the mountains where many martial arts techniques originated. Even the hoe-and-mattock move I'm learning was created by generations of martial monks through farming work.

July 11th: Besides the usual training, Coach Odell taught me various unarmed combat techniques based on the hoe-and-mattock move. These techniques include launching attacks from different angles, slapping the opponent's face, grabbing, gouging eyes, and transitioning to elbow strikes, chest punches, and knee strikes to the groin if the initial move misses. These brutal and vicious techniques are unsuitable for combat sports but require extensive real-world experience to master.

July 12th: Today, Coach Odell added a new physical training method called "Crouching Tiger Skill," which involves crawling on all fours, similar to a plank exercise, and very demanding. Coach Gu Yang still had us carrying loads without introducing anything new. Odell's meals are getting even better. He genuinely seems committed to mentoring me, and I'm determined to repay his efforts in the future. It's remarkable that a foreigner is so dedicated to Chinese culture. As a Chinese, I must work even harder. Additionally, under Odell's strikes, I began to feel a resonance between my flesh and breathing, and the excruciating pain from before seemed to transform into a faintly comfortable sensation. Could this be an illusion?

July 13th: I seem to have grasped a breathing rhythm. During sparring with Josh, my muscles instinctively tightened when he punched me, then immediately relaxed, and the pain dissipated. However, this state is inconsistent, showing I still can't fully control muscle relaxation and tension. I need more practice. Odell said this inconsistency is called "Qi disruption" in ancient Chinese martial arts texts. When I looked up these old texts online, the language was too arcane for me to understand. I guess I need to improve my classical Chinese skills. At least the "Great Corpse State" for sleeping works wonders—I sleep soundly and feel energetic all day. But I'm using too much medicated oil, nearly a bottle a day.

July 14th: Looking in the mirror, I noticed I've grown muscle, gotten taller, and my skin seems smoother. Coach Odell said my excellent mental state and perfectly balanced hormones have revitalized my bodily functions. Occasionally, Coach Gu Yang observes me with a puzzled look. However, he hasn't given me any special treatment and continues assigning us to carry loads, even on increasingly challenging paths, such as mountain roads. This has given me a new appreciation for the hardships of farmers. Additionally, Odell taught me a massage technique to identify acupuncture points on the body, which has deepened my understanding of physical structure and exercise methods.

July 15th: Coach Gu Yang gave us the day off, so I spent the entire day training with Coach Odell. Josh, the maniac, continues his intense training daily and even secretly spars with people at local martial arts gyms. He told me about a bar in town that hosts nightly boxing matches where winners earn money. The city also has numerous boxing gyms and small competitions. As tempting as it is to test myself, I've only been training for half a month, so I'm not ready. Coach Odell will leave next month to visit Tibet and India in search of supernatural powers. I must seize the time to learn as much as possible from him. I still don't understand what supernatural powers are. How can someone as rigorous and scientific as Odell believe in such things? As for the saying, 'The end of science is philosophy, and the end of philosophy is theology,' I don't buy it. To me, martial arts are just the application of mental and physical strength. Mental strength enhances physical strength, and physical strength reinforces mental strength. That's all there is to it."]

Chapter 10: Supercompensation True Science of Martial Arts

Another eight days passed.

Su Jie had been studying at the "Minglun Martial Arts Academy" for half a month.

For most students, fifteen days would merely be a vacation filled with sleeping in, playing online games, and enjoying the air conditioning.

But for Su Jie, these fifteen days had brought about monumental changes in both body and mind.

Under the guidance of Odell, a world-class coach, Su Jie's understanding of martial arts improved by leaps and bounds. He had shed all confusion and was progressing boldly.

His physical fitness also reached a new level.

Though he couldn't yet compare with athletes who had trained for years, he was far stronger than the average student.

The most important gain was that he learned the correct training methods from Odell, ensuring he wouldn't waste time on detours. Even after Odell left, Su Jie could train independently.

This was critical.

July 16th arrived, the official start of summer break according to Guyang's schedule.

At three in the morning, Su Jie went to Odell's courtyard.

As usual, he enjoyed a hearty breakfast and began various flexibility exercises.

The warm-up routines resembled Tai Chi joint exercises, purely preparatory. However, as Su Jie's body developed and his muscles became more defined, Odell tailored additional movements for him. These included simple actions like leg presses, splits, waist twists, forward and backward stretches, and symmetrical exercises to loosen up key areas of the body. This thorough preparation ensured that the formal training session would yield maximum benefits and help him quickly get into the right state.

Warm-ups were essential and could not be skipped.

Odell's meals were top-notch, consisting of nutritious, high-quality ingredients specifically tailored to Su Jie's physique. This demonstrated the professionalism of a world-class martial arts coach.

"Training is fundamentally about making yourself stronger, but if you don't understand the principles of becoming stronger, you can't grasp what true training is," Odell said, watching Su Jie finish his warm-up and begin the lesson.

"When muscles are stimulated, glycogen is consumed. Afterward, the glycogen not only replenishes but also surpasses its original level. In science, this is called supercompensation, and it's one reason why consistent training makes you stronger. However, there's a limit—overtraining can deplete key substances in the body, causing permanent reductions in physical ability. Accurately gauging this balance is crucial, and even I can't do it as well as artificial intelligence."

"Moderation in all things," Su Jie agreed. "This aligns with the Chinese philosophy of the golden mean—balancing yin and yang. Only by achieving an extreme balance between training and recovery can progress be both rapid and perfect."

"You have great insight," Odell nodded. "Modern martial arts theory divides physical fitness into four key areas: the physiological cross-sectional area of muscles, the nervous system's regulation, the efficiency of bones acting as levers, and the composition of muscle fibers. All training revolves around these four aspects. For example, bone efficiency as a lever corresponds to the concept of unified power in Chinese martial arts, often called integrated force. Meanwhile, the nervous system's regulation ties to reaction speed, courage, hormone secretion, and inner calm—all of which are fundamental to internal cultivation methods in martial arts."

Su Jie asked, “I’ve researched martial arts materials online, and traditional Chinese martial arts often emphasize integrated force, with countless types of power and techniques. Even simple movements come with explanations that could fill essays or books. It all seems overly complex and hard to understand. Isn’t there a lot of unnecessary mystification?”

“What do you think?” Odell countered.

“I think movements like the hoe strike—lifting, plunging, stepping, wrapping, stretching, releasing, exhaling, and retracting—do indeed involve deep principles. Writing a book about them isn’t impossible. The more I practice, the more profound and expansive it feels,” Su Jie reflected. “But once this move is mastered, it seems to encompass all other movements.”

“Exactly. Your understanding shows that you’re on the right path in martial arts,” Odell said. “I’ve seen many martial artists waste decades pursuing the wrong methods, achieving nothing in the end.”

“I’ll be leaving soon. Tell me, what have I taught you during this time? Can you continue practicing on your own after I leave?”

“I’ve learned the true method of practicing and applying the hoe strike, the warm-up joint exercises you taught me, and the muscle and skin conditioning techniques for relaxation and tension. You also taught me how to manage my eating and sleeping routines with the ‘Great Corpse State’ method. If you leave, I can still practice the hoe strike, warm-ups, and maintain proper routines. However, continuing the muscle conditioning will be difficult without you. It requires precise striking techniques, and if someone else does it incorrectly, not only will it

hinder progress, but I could also get injured,” Su Jie replied without hesitation, showing he had thought deeply about this issue.

In any sport, the coach is crucial.

Having an international top-tier coach like Odell was the key to Su Jie’s rapid progress. Without him, Su Jie’s training would stall.

Even world champions and boxing kings rely on coaches for daily training.

Without a coach, practicing alone is like a blind man feeling an elephant—it’s easy to develop bad habits. This is especially true for Su Jie, who is currently at a critical stage in his growth and cannot afford to lack guidance.

“You’re right. After I leave, you can’t just randomly find someone to hit you for horizontal training. However, there are some real experts at the Minglun Martial Arts Academy who can help you train. Once you truly reach the stage where your entire body becomes soft as cotton, hard as iron, and capable of twisting freely at will, you’ll be able to train yourself through autonomous movement without needing anyone to strike you,” Odell said. “This is a hallmark of China’s hard Qigong, which actually mirrors a level in ancient yoga. It greatly benefits physical fitness.”

“I’ve been training horizontally for so long that I’ve noticed something unusual. No matter how hard I train, my muscles don’t get sore anymore, and my

endurance has increased significantly,” Su Jie remarked, having long been aware of his peculiar situation.

“Muscle soreness results from prolonged tension and the accumulation of lactic acid under pressure. If not relieved through methods like massage or saunas, it can settle over time, leading to calcification. This causes frequent soreness in the soft tissues, eventually leading to numbness and loss of sensation,” Odell explained in his usual scientific and medical style. “Typically, students studying hunched over or working at a computer for long periods face these issues in their shoulders, neck, and lower back. The same goes for those doing farm work. Severe calcification sometimes requires surgical intervention, using needles to peel it off. Traditional Chinese acupuncture often works on the same principle, extracting blocked calcifications from the muscles and skin. My horizontal training method ensures your body remains free of blockages, making it hypersensitive. Eventually, you’ll reach a state where your skin alone can sense even the subtlest changes in the surrounding airflow.”

Su Jie wanted to ask more questions, but Odell stopped him. “That’s all I’ll teach for now. Let’s begin horizontal training.”

Su Jie quickly stood still, ready to accept Odell’s strikes.

Using a rubber baton, Odell struck him, producing varying sounds—sometimes crisp, sometimes muffled.

The crisp sounds indicated force concentrated on the surface, while the muffled ones showed deeper penetration of force.

At times, Odell also used his palms, fists, fingers, twists, pinches, and presses.

These techniques were all aimed at enhancing Su Jie's skin, muscles, and tendons' flexibility and sharpening his perception.

This was the essence of Odell's expertise as a world-class coach. Basic joint exercises and martial arts advice could be taught by many, but his methods set him apart.

After the horizontal training, they moved on to physical conditioning, the so-called martial arts drills.

Oddly, Odell's physical training for Su Jie included only running, push-ups, planks, crawling in the "lying tiger" pose, squats, and jumps—none of the usual bag-punching or striking drills essential in combat training.

“Coach, isn't bag-punching and target-striking vital in combat? Why don't you include those in my training?” Su Jie asked during a break after their session.

“Bag-punching and target-striking are simple and can be practiced on your own later. Do you know why I have you focus on these specific exercises now?” Odell asked with a smile.

“It feels like body sculpting in fitness,” Su Jie replied after some thought.

“Exactly, body sculpting,” Odell confirmed, impressed by Su Jie’s quick thinking. “At your age, your body is like a sapling. If it starts growing crooked, it’ll never grow tall. But if it’s tied straight from the start, given proper nutrients, pest control, and care, it’ll grow into a towering tree. My training ensures your physique is perfect, with no asymmetry, and prevents you from taking detours in your martial arts journey.”

“Isn’t the training designed by artificial intelligence more advanced than yours? Wouldn’t it achieve more perfect sculpting?” Su Jie posed a sharp question.

“This...” Odell faltered momentarily before his gaze turned deep. “In truth, the human body’s potential is limitless, especially in terms of psychological resilience. You’re my experimental subject. I’m recording all your data to reference later. I believe I can do better than artificial intelligence.”

“I’ll fully cooperate with your experiment,” Su Jie assured him.

“Good,” Odell said, clapping his hands. “Let’s continue training.”