



by Guru Scott McQuaid

Sumatran silat or *silek* as it is known in its original dialect is regarded as rebellious silat, particularly in the Minangkabau provinces where the Minang tribes refused to pay poll tax to the Dutch government during their occupation of Indonesia. This rebellion on the Sumatran island was led by Guru Neko Raj Api, a practitioner in the *Minangkabu Silek Harimau* (tiger) system.

This Minang warrior was feared by the Dutch soldiers as he seemed unstoppable, described as a fire sweeping from the forest. They believed he had some internal power and so the Dutch named him 'the old king of fire'. The infamous words *patai* - meaning 'no pay' - would soon resonate around Sumatra and so Sumatran silat would be known as *patai silat*, symbolizing the free spirit of Sumatran people. In the *kampung* (village) areas of Sumatra you can still hear the term *silek patai* used by old silat *pendekars* (warrior teachers).

It was in the Pagarujuung region close to the major town of Bukittinggi where the style of *silek patai* was created some time in the early 20th century. Unfortunately the founder is unknown but the recorded head of the system is Guru Munap Malin Mudo. The style consists of lots of crouching *kudas* (stances) that can be traced back to the harimau system. Patai techniques focus on open hand and arm parries to the adversary's attacks. The *diwi-kuda* move, which is a cross leg step over, helps with evasion and positioning; it is perhaps the core

of the

langkah

(footwork) used in this style. The art generally slaps kicking attacks away but grabs arm strikes and proceeds to open up the opponent to deliver their own strike. The Patai system can be compared to the Brazilian Capoeira style in so much that it uses rhythmic phrases in a dance-like motion to execute its attacks.



There is little known about the *Silek Baru* style. It is said to come from Padang, it fights from a static position, the practitioners digging their feet into the ground for a strong support. The Baru pesilats use their arms and the adversaries' own weight to defeat them.

The name *Silek Kumango* comes from the Kumango village from its creator Syekh Abdurrahman al-Khalidi who later became to be known as Guru Syekh Kumango. The art rose to popularity as did Guru Kumango around 1820 in the *Tanah Datar* (flat land) near the Batusangkar area in West Sumatra.

The religious teachings of Islam help shape the characteristic philosophy and influenced the physical nature of *Silek Kumango*. It is because of this religious influence that Kumango is very different to other *silek aliran* (silek styles) in Sumatra that tend to take inspiration from animals and terrain. The overarching principal of Kumango is defense, as it is forbidden to retaliate straight-away. The passive approach to the fight is to use the *durus*

(movements) of evasion and resist the impulse to counter-attack. It is only after the fifth attack when the kumango pesilat (silat player) can retaliate with locking maneuvers to incapacitate the enemy. The emphasis of this silek style is locking techniques; out of the eleven duru's within their arsenal almost all of them use locks to over come their adversary.

It is said that a Kumango pesilat can escape from almost any lock or hold. The practitioner will appear evasive only to suddenly switch and redirect themselves to a better advantage point.

The Kumango style has a very soft flow; much like Tai Chi there seem to be traces of the Kuntao system from the Batak tribe in Northern Sumatra.

Around the 1840's, *Silek Lintau* emerged from the small village of Lintau in the Bukittinggi vicinity. This style specializes in locking tactics particularly on the joints of the body. The Lintau style is allied to Kumango silek, it uses a lot of foot-stamping actions. A Lintau pesilat is cunning as he surprises his opponent by stamping hard on their foot which also pins their adversary momentarily so they can strike their static target. Sometimes the stamp will be applied as they move past them in one swift motion just to unsettle their adversary. Another reason for this stamping techniques is to give them solid grounding for particular attacks and also for distraction along with thigh-slapping sounds to disorientate their attacker. This thigh slapping technique can be seen in various Minangkabau silek styles.



The Sterlak style of silek originated from the Kamang, Agam region of West Sumatra around 1852. It is said to have been created by Guru Tuanku Syech Habibullah and later modified and made popular by Guru Ulud Bagindo Chatib around 1865.

This style would spread across Indonesia's archipelago and into Malaysia most notably in the Malay Semenanjung area.

The name *Silek Sterlak* signifies "to attack with strength". It was the style developed to counter the dangerous *harimau* (tiger) system of silek.

Silek Sterlak has a very direct approach in its application. The mindset is to attack the opponent as a herd of stampeding elephants. Its soul emphasis is on direct powerful attacks, throwing the entire body weight behind the strike. This gave the art a hard Japanese kamikaze approach to combat. Unlike most martial art systems that step and parry off the center line of attack, Sterlak

steps forward with solid grounding footwork, attacking whilst defending in one swift movement.

The *Minang Silek Tuo* art from the surrounding villages of Padang is said to be one of the oldest silek systems and closely related in its appearance to Sterlak. The Sterlak influence also spread across the mainland to Java, with its techniques seen in the Persaudaraan *Setia Hati* style.

Setia Hati - meaning 'faithful heart' - was named to represent the spiritual principle of the art. This is perhaps the biggest difference between Javanese silat and Sumatran silat. The Javanese styles of silat place heavy emphasis on the *ilmu* (spiritual) aspects of their fighting arts, integrating trance work and animal mannerisms within their silat. Sumatran silek concentrates on the physical elements of the art of war; the focus is on *kudas* (stances) and engaging the enemy. Like most Minang fighting arts, it is very rare to find Sterlak but the art can still be seen today in Sawahlunnto, Padang and Bengkulu.

Although this style was initially created to counter the *harimau* system it was not effective against the brutal ground attacks of *harimau pelajarn* (students). However, the art was successful against other upright martial arts. In the 1960's, Maha Guru Adityo Mataram Hanafi incorporated the system of Sterlak into his existing harimau style, making the art both effective in the orthodox upright position as well as its deadly ground work. The founder of the *Silek Harimau* is said to be Guru Poyeng Lebeh; the art was designed around the surrounding marshland terrain left from the rain forests. Because the Minangkabau tribe are predominately animists, the tiger became the inspiration for this fighting style. It is said that the Minang pesilat became the very thing they feared, the tiger.



Minangkabau Silek Systems

- Silek Harimau
- Silek Tuo
- Silek Lintau
- Silek Sterlak
- Silek Kumanggo
- Silek Patai
- Silek Baru

- Silek Pauh
- Silek Luncua
- Silek Gulo Gulo Tareh
- Silek Ulu Ambek

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