



**by Guru Scott McQuaid**

Indonesia's mass archipelago is home to many *Pencak Silat* fighting systems and each style has their preferred weapon. The *Ke*  
*ris*

knife is perhaps the most influential and famous weapon associated with pencak silat and the *Karamabit* blade is another popular choice, but there are many more practical and deadlier weapons used within silat.

The knowledge of the *Kujang* blade has been kept alive through Sundanese *pantun* or oral tradition and the chant of poetic verses about the golden age of the Sunda Pajajaran kingdom. The kujang is a Sundanese knife only found in Sunda, roughly shaped like a deer's antler. Folklore notes that the blade's shape was created to resemble the island of Java. Some say it was a King that invented the blade's design. Indonesia is predominately an Islamic country but the kujang predates the arrival of Islam to its shores and could be of Hindu origin. Scholars date the blade back to the 8th century.

There are various theories on this blade, many believe it was an agricultural tool, others say it was nothing more than a dress piece for clan leaders wearing it upon their attire much like the keris knife. The blade is made of steel and is 20 to 25 cm in length. The kujang became a part of Sundanese silat and is famously linked to the Cimande style. The knife has an upturned sharp point which acts like a regular knife for slashing but the blade's curved middle is used for hooking their opponent, tearing tendons and muscle. The knife can also be used in a downwards chopping motion like an axe due to its unique shape. When you rotate the blade upside down this presents different cuts against your assailant. The knife can easily castrate your enemy in this position and disembowel organs.

There is a long period where the kujang lay dormant after the fall of Padjadjaran kingdom in the 14-15th century. The knife emerged again in the 19-20th century during the rise of nationalism in Sundaland. With the reappearance of the kujang came new interpretations within its blade having one, three, five, or seven holes. There are many ideas behind these holes and their relevance but nothing that can be undoubtedly proven. Some Indonesians maintain that the kujang is a *pusaka* or heirloom with esoteric power and is nothing more than a symbol for the Sundanese culture. They note that it became weaponized by foreign Western pendekars or teachers. However there is no way of proving any of these theories.



One of the most feared and unusual weapons found in pencak silat is the *Ekor Pari* or stingray tail which is used as whip.

The stingray tail was worn by silat warriors, having it wrapped around their waist underneath their sarong. It is said to be popular among female pesilats (silat players). The creation of this fish tail to a weapon comes from a Javanese folk tale about a woman that was attacked at night in her hut while she was cooking stingray. The man is said to have tried to rape her and during their struggle she grabbed the tail of the stingray she had previously cut off and whipped her attacker. The man fled from the incident and later the woman shared her discovery of this deadly whipping device with the rest of her village. Aside from this story it is important to note that the stingray tail has been used for centuries as a whip by Indonesian farmers as a tool to control and guide buffalo and horses.

The stingray is a member of the cartilaginous fishes, its tail can reach a length of 135 cm and silat practitioners use various lengths of the ekor pari in their training. The abrasive, dried skin of the tail is very coarse like sandpaper, it is highly durable, 25 times more durable than cowhide leather. Its surface resembles sharkskin only with hundreds of small bumps protruding and varying in size. Whipping an opponent with the tail would undoubtedly rip patches of skin off any

person. The most notable silat style that implores the ekor pari into their arsenal is the Javanese system, Harimau Berantai Silat but Filipino Kali Silat also utilizes it. The Filipinos call it *buntot pagi* and it is said to be a useful implement for repelling ghosts, ghouls, witches and other creatures referred to as aswang by the Visaya community. Obviously one has to believe in ghosts to even begin considering how to apply this to the supernatural.



*Tongkat* refers to the stick fighting used within pencak silat but the literal meaning of tongkat is 'walking stick'. The walking stick is used as a weapon in some silat systems and often used by the older Grandmasters. The handle is used to hook and trap the opponent's weapon hand or the enemies body parts. The handle is often used to sweep their assailant's leg or ankle. There are various types of tongkat ranging in length and weight. All tongkat sticks are typically made out of bamboo due to the tribes natural surrounding resource. As the Minangkabau tribe say: " *Alam takambang menjadi guru*" (the surrounding nature is our teacher).

The Cimande style uses a short heavy baton like stick called

*kanching*

meaning bolt which is used in close quarter combat to block and hit the enemies' weapon, then they counter with short base strikes on the inside. In the Harimau Berantai Silat system they use a bamboo staff tongkat. They strike from long to mid-distance often using both ends of the stick in their attacks. Silek Harimau warriors from the Minangkabau tribe use a half length tongkat kecil or short stick also known as

*Ranjau tongkat*

. This bamboo has sharp points at either end and was often used to stab their opponent amongst delivering fast multiple strikes. The ranjau version of the stick is very popular with the Batak tribe in Northern Sumatra. The Batak tribe were infamous weapon warriors, it is said that they have no actual structured style of silat of their own but borrowed concepts from their neighboring Minangkabau tribe. The Batak mainly used the ranjau in traps, they would stick the sharp stick in a hole they had dug out and then cover the trap with foliage. These traps were set around the perimeter of their village for protection. The ranjau tongkat or tongkat kecil strikes and disarming applications are very similar to the famous Kali stick fighting methods from the Philippines. Kali is believed to be an ancient term used to signify the martial arts in the Southern region of the Philippines, where it is called Kali silat. There are many speculations on the word

kali and its origins, one belief is that the word comes from

*tjakalele*

, which is a tribal style of stick-fencing from Indonesia. Archaeological evidence does show that Sumatran Sirivjaya warriors immigrated to the Philippine Island of Cebu in the 7th century. More fled to the island escaping the domination of the Javanese Majapahit empire in 13th and 16th centuries. It is believed that these stick and blade warriors introduced the early beginnings of kali. Sumatra's Minangkabau tribe used the ranjau tongkat much like the movements of kali only due to the sharp edges at both ends of the stick they would hit and stab their opponents using both ends of the stick in close quarter combat. Minang Silek Harimau practitioners would often attack their adversary high with the ranjau stick before switching to a low position of attack and stabbing the stick butt into the leg behind the knee.



The *Rencong* is the most famous blade used on the island of Sumatra, it is comparable to the infamous keris blade in other parts of Indonesia. However the rencong blade is more practical in battle. The rencong knife comes from Aceh in the North part of Sumatra. The Acehnese say that the rencong takes the shape of the invocation, "*Bismillaah*" or in the name of God. This invocation is used by Muslims at the beginning of an undertaking. It is important to note that Aceh is extremely religious so they will connect the blade to their beliefs. With this being said Acehnese were originally nomadic hunter-gatherers living in small bands and depending entirely on wild forest resources for subsistence. Although, some Acehnese believe the rencong was already used during the first Islamic Sultanate in the 13th century, the oldest-known specimen dates from the 17th century and can be seen at the Prague Military Museum. The Acehnese apply the rencong to the Pencak Silat Siwah style. There are various types of rencong with the blade varying in length from 10 to 50 cm. The design resembles an 'L' shape and this blade has a pistolgrip. Acehnese warriors wore the blade at the front of their sarong and used the knife in battles against the neighboring Batak kingdoms and later against the Dutch, Portuguese, and Japanese invaders.

The Minangkabau tribe in West Sumatra developed their own version of the rencong that is known as *tumbuak lado* or chilli crusher, which has a slight curve. There was a great demand for weapons in Aceh and the Minangkabau were known for manufacturing arms for their own use and so they supplied the enormous demand in Ache. The rencong knife is very effective in

close quarter combat and due to its pistol grip it is easy to retrieve from opponent's body. The blade is utilized in stabbing, slashing and hacking. This smaller 10 cm version of the knife is used in various Sumatran silat styles such as Silek Sterlak, Silek Kumango and Silek Harimau. The longer 50 cm small sword version known as Rencong Aceh was extremely effective with harimau *pesilats* (silat players). The blade's reverse handle made it easier to grip as the cutting edge aligned alongside the outside of the handler's forearm. Silek harimau fighters often use their elbows to attack so the blade worked with the body movement in striking and defending as they moved past their assailant. The Minang tribe made a huge profit from shipping these rencong Aceh blades back to its source of origin. The rencong blade is recognized today in its state as a symbol of Aceh and not as a weapon of war.



Kapak Kecil translates to small axe. This unique weapon is believed to have come from Java during the reign of the Majapahit kingdom which arose from the 1293 to around 1500. This weapon became very popular with Javanese women, they would use them for daily chores such as farming, carving and peeling fruit. Some *Srikandi* or lady warriors concealed the small axe by strapping it to the inside of their leg while others placed it beneath their sarong or sash. The Batak tribe in Northern Sumatra carried the kapak kecil inconspicuously on their backs, high up near their neck. This way they could reach it and by stretching their arm back over their shoulder using the motion to throw it into their enemy. The distance the axe traveled for accuracy would be between 3 to 7 meters. Pesilats from the Harimau Berantai clan were infamous for using this weapon in battle. Their focus was to cut, or hack the weapon hand of their opponent in order to weaken it and then follow up with a straight punch using the axe blade to split the face of their opponent. To finish of their attacker they would hack at the veins on the side or behind the neck of their enemy.

As the weapon traveled around Indonesia it eventually made it way to Pattani Siam in the 15th century. During that time this area was still a part of Malaysia and the Majapahit empire. The Pattani province is now a part of Southern Thailand and the kapak kecil became a tool for work and combat for the Siamese people. The weapon is still referred to as 'axe siam' by both the Thais and Malaysians in the north of the peninsula. The Malay Tomi silat practitioners also adopted kapak kecil and it became very popular in Kelantan. The weapon made headlines in

Kelantan and it was banned in the state, when during the 1970s gangs started to use the small axe in assassinations.

In ancient times the kapak kecil was made out of three layers of metals. The hammer part of the blade's head is for striking and the side sharp axe edge is for hacking and slashing. The target area is the opponent's face. The small axe measures less than 18cm in length from the tip of its blade to the handle. Its wood handle is generally made from '*kayu nibung*' which is a type of wood found on most of South East Asia's beaches. This blade is now associated with silat but there are very few schools or instructors that contain the knowledge of how to apply the weapon in combat.



Silat styles have such a rich history with interesting and deadly weapons, but when it comes to combat, weapons may be an important factor but certainly not the decisive one. It is the man and not the materials that count.

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