

by Guru Scott McQuaid

The word *'Adat'* refers to the indigenous traditions and customs practiced within the Pencak Silat tribes. The adat comprises laws and guidelines regulating in aspects of life that are woven into Indonesian historical facts, legends and proverbs.

The Indonesian forms of pencak silat are a practical combative system that incorporates the concepts of change but the rituals and customs remain rooted in tradition. Preserving the adat in its complete and original interpretation from a physiological and psychological standpoint should ensure that the style of silat will not divert from its root of origin.

Pencak silat techniques were like precious family secrets that were handed down from one generation to the next. Silat has always been shrouded in mystery and secret, with some village *datuk* (clan leaders) carefully selecting their students through a process of trials that included walking on hot coals, eating broken glass, jumping through a ring of fire and sometimes self mutilation upon their arm's with a blade. At one time silat was jealously guarded by royal households, the inheritors, either male or female, young or old, usually maintain the tradition or improved upon the art behind closed doors. This is why there are as many exponents as there are variations of pencak silat.

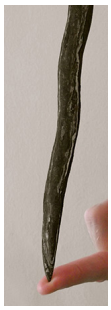
Today many of these forms of adat have faded away but some tribes in rural areas of Indonesia and Malaysia as well as urban silat schools uphold their preferred silat cultural traditions.

Many Javanese and Malay pencak silat styles will begin a class with the ritual of washing each others feet. In the Malay style of Silat Seni Gayong, there is an ancient adat initiation custom known as *mandi minyak* or oil bath. This famed hot oil bath is rooted in *kebatinan* (spirituality). The initiate places their hands and arms into a bowl of thick coconut boiling oil. Then a flamed bamboo stick of fire is run across their hands and arms. The practitioners claim their prayers prevent the flames from burning their skin. A strong believe of faith can certainly block out pain, but to bring this custom back down to earth, the dense coating of coconut oil also prevents the flames from reaching the skin.



There are various displays of adat performances in pencak silat, in Malaysia's Johor the system known as Silat Sendeng Muar performs ceremonial movements for Ramadhan. Usually during Indonesian and Malay weddings there will be a display of pesilats or silat players performing the art of Silat Pulut (sticky rice silat).

In the old Sundanese style of Cimande Silat, a special ceremony called *kecer mata* is performed to initiate its members. The guru prays during the ceremony while members are inducted by having each of the initiates drop a mixture of water and
sirih
or bettelnut extract into the student's eyes. After this section of the ceremony is complete, the new students are given a
'talek'
or a set of by-laws to follow. This protocol continues today in modern Cimande schools across the globe as the mystical appeal attracts foreigners.



In the rare style of Harimau Berantai Silat (Tiger Chained Silat) from Java, a pesilat will have to bring specific items with them upon receiving a title of *wira* (hero), *pendekar* (warrior) or *guru* (teacher). They are expected to bring a dozen roses, some rice with a turmeric powder added known as
beras kunyit
and some money for their teacher to be clothed. During the occasion the Maha Guru will perform
'dabus'
whereby the teacher will pierce various parts of the pesilat using a keris. They will then throw up the mixture of rice and rose petals into the air and let it shower down upon the student. Lastly they will be presented with their own keris that is selected personally by the Maha Guru for each silat warrior. Once again the rice and rose petals are thrown over the keris and if a rose petal sticks to the keris then it is said that the blade is hungry for battle. This is considered a positive sign. Much of this practice is considered to be
kejawen
or Javanese beliefs. All keris are said to have
hantu
or spirit. As mentioned above, during the ceremony the Maha Guru will push the tip of the keris blade into various parts of the student's body. The teacher presses the keris blade into the back of the student's neck, thumbs and big toes. This practice is a blessing of protection, creating a guardian spirit around the pesilat in combat.

In West Sumatra, the Minangkabau tribe awards the title of pendekar or guru to their Silek Harimau (tiger silat) practitioners through '*bertinju*'; this term refers to a challenge of matches. Often the pesilat will have to fight two or three opponents at once, this practice is known as *kerojok*
, and the name implies a fight of one against many. The pesilat will be brutally attacked and have to fend off their opponents. This exercise is often done at the end of a grueling three to four hour training session. Following the student's title the custom of *merantau*
(right of passage) is carried out by the Minangkabau pesilat, whereby the practitioner will temporary migrate, usually to a city from their village. This adat is unique to the Minangkabau tribe and continues today.



Adat remains an important part of silat prescribing basic life principles, balance and harmony and a specific code of combat.

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