



by **Guru Scott McQuaid**

The art known as silat has always been associated with some of the most unique and deadliest combat weapons used on the battlefield. The cradle of silat is within the Indonesian archipelago and the Malay peninsula, there are over a hundred different styles of silat and each system employs bladed weapons.

The *cabang* is a defensive bladed weapon. Cabang translates to 'branch' in Bahasa Indonesia and it is believed to have come from the island of Java. Scholars say the weapon was developed from the Indian 'trisula', which was a unique three spear mould that sat on the top of a staff as a Hindu-Buddhist religious symbol. The Hindu God Kali is clearly seen holding the trisula. The earliest evidence of Cabang is depicted in Javanese art and eventually the weapon spread across Asian countries such as Thailand, China, Okinawa and Malaysia where it is known as the 'Tekpi'.

The Cabang is a three-pronged truncheon weapon made famous in the 21st century by the animated cartoon, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. It also became the preferred weapon for Marvel's comic book assassin character Elektra. Only the version depicted in these comics, cartoons and movies was the Okinawa version known as the 'Sai'. This weapon had long been associated to Japanese fighting arts such as Shotokan Karate, Jiu Jitsu and Ninjutsu. It is said that the Sai was originally a farm tool on the island of Okinawa. Its purpose was to aid in planting seeds. It was placed in the ground to create a deep hole, the longer middle shaft created the hole while the two outer prong shafts help measure out an equal distance for the other seeds in the dirt. So when the seed was planted there were two equidistant marks so the seeds would not be planted too closely. It later became a weapon used by farmers to protect themselves against invaders.







Indonesian Silat that involves the cabang.
Malay *Tempo* magazine photo by the editors.
Published in the magazine, 2014.