



by Guru Scott McQuaid

The historical study of martial arts is complex. Written evidence mostly does not exist and the teachings of the art is handed down from teacher to student by word of mouth.

The combat system of *Pencak Silat* originated from the Indonesian archipelago and then spread to the Malaysian Peninsular across into Thailand and onto the islands of the Philippines. Evidence of *silat* in Indonesia dates back to the sixth century, from the two kingdoms of Srivijaya in Sumatra and the Majapahit in Java.

The earliest forms of silat taught in its present configuration is found on the island of Sumatra. This beginning of the martial art was called *Silek* which is the generic term for fighting arts within the Minangkabau region. It is said that during the 11th century B.C. the clan leader of the Minangkabau tribe, Datuk Suri, created silek in his village at the foot of Mount Marapi. Datuk Suri is believed to have come from Pariangan in West Sumatra's Minangkabau subdistrict. It is the conjecture that silek then spread across the Minang province and was advanced and developed by the nomads throughout Southeast Asia.

One of the oldest Minangkabau silat styles is '*Silek Harimau*', (tiger silat). There are various interpretations of the tiger systems within the Minang community. The basis of the Minangkabau Silek Harimau system was inspired by the Sumatran tiger's low attacks and body mechanics. This combat art was designed to fight from low postures and from the ground. This was due to the slippery marshland left behind from the rainforest making it hard to find firm footing in an orthodox upright position.



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