

### **Silat Cekak: The Art of Malay Martial Wisdom**

Md Radzi Hanafi, Roslan Manap, Mohd Azhar Mohd Ali, Aminudin Dahlan, Mohd Syukri  
Madnor, Md Sabri Mohd Yusoff  
Federation of Seni Silat Cekak Pusaka Ustaz Hanafi Malaysia

#### **Abstract**

Martial arts can be much more than just a way to improve fighting skills. It can also be a way of life, a path to personal development, and a means to develop qualities such as discipline, respect, and mental fortitude. The philosophy of martial arts is deeply rooted in mindfulness, self-awareness, and self-improvement. With such characteristics, Silat Cekak is one of the Silat martial arts that fulfil the requirements for development personnel and moving forward organization. We are preserving the Silat towards international recognition such as “Largest Silat Performance” by The Malaysia Book of Records on 10 Oct 2010, while on 29 Aug 2015, we were announced as the world record holder of “Largest Silat Lesson” by Guinness World Records. These achievements are possible due to the teaching methods in Silat Cekak Pusaka Hanafi. In the end, the next generation will appreciate what the last generation has done to make known that Silat is not left behind compared to other martial arts in general.

**Keywords: Silat Cekak, heritage, identity**

#### **Introduction**

Malay society is known as an enriching society with a variety of heritage and culture, which is attractive and unique. One of them became the Malay symbol which is Silat art. Silat is defined as knowledge of self-defence in Malay society from the past. Silat art is being said as an important knowledge used in war. So, what are the differences between Malay martial arts to Indonesia? Silat is based on geometrical lines and human anatomy movements and is well-

known in Malaysia (Anuar, 1992), while Pencak Silat is popular among Indonesians, who follow or are inspired by animal movements (Maryono, 2000).

Martial arts are deeply embedded in the histories and cultures of the societies from which they originate. Many styles, such as Kung Fu from China, Karate from Japan, Capoeira from Brazil and Silat from Malaysia have been developed over centuries, shaped by the needs of defence, spiritual development, and cultural practices. Martial Arts as its Living Heritage, its Past, Present, and Future, emphasizes the dynamic and evolving nature of martial arts. It recognizes the deep historical roots of martial arts, its relevance in contemporary society, and its potential to grow and adapt for future generations (*Mohd Azhar Mohd Ali, pers comm. 2024*).

### **Origin of Malay Silat**

Silat is the lively self-defence rooted in the Malay Archipelago. Silat was noticed in the earlier Langkasuka government (2<sup>nd</sup> century) until the Sultanate Malacca era reign (13<sup>th</sup> century) (Vincent et al. 2015a). Since the colonization of Malaya (Tanah Melayu), Silat has been marginalized from the palace. Silat teachers were ex-warriors or kings of war men who continued to struggle and develop the institute of Malay martial arts education including passing down the science of Silat from generation to generation. In addition, during British colonization, Silat was taught discreetly in the outskirts and villages to use it in combat to stand up against them (*Muhammad Hasnizam & Muammar Ghaddafi, 2019*).

Till now, Silat has evolved as part of the culture and social tradition with the emergence of good physical and spiritual training. There are many inspired Silat movements by human anatomy, the natural environment and animals, where the Silat College is known, for example, Silat Harimau (Tiger). Silat Harimau is based on inspired by the movement of the Tiger with such creativity to form arts of self-defence with attack and copy of Tiger action with hands,

legs and other body movements. Another example is Silat Cekak, where such movement is from human beings and it's natural (*Hanafi, 1973; Halimah, 1977; Md Radzi, 2019*).

### **Silat in Malaysia Today**

Many communities are responsible for raising the heritage of Malay martial arts consisting of 14 states in Malaysia. About 548 practitioners of the Silat community association are active in Malaysia. In general, these communities are coordinated by two main bodies, which are the Malaysian National Silat Federation (PESAKA) and the Malaysian Silat World Association (DSSM). PESAKA play a role in sports development while DSSM is more to arts, culture and recreation. Both associations are very active in carrying out many activities for the dignity of Silat. Each nation has its art of self-defence. But for Malay society, self-defence is known as Silat, some examples of Gayang Lima, Gayung, Cekak, Cimande, Kuntau, etc. are big names in Silat College available in Malaysia (*Hanafi, 1973; Halimah, 1977; Md Radzi, 2019*).

### **Core Principles of Silat**

Before Silat was to be used, Malay self-defence was also known as a knowledge of war, a knowledge of commanders, a knowledge of soldiers or a knowledge of bravery that is used for warrior fit which contains the secret of traditional Malay art knowledge (Anuar, 2008). Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Language and Literature Council Dictionary) (2011) defines the word art (seni) as beautiful works created. Meanwhile, Malay Silat art is a type of knowledge of self-defence recognised as native rights belonging to the Malays (*Tuan Ismail, 1991*).

### **Introduction to Silat Cekak Pusaka Hanafi**

Briefly, Silat Cekak has its movements, which are natural movements of human beings and are not inspired by animal movements, plants or any natural phenomenon. Its methods of self-defence and attack are inspired by the movement in Solah (the Arabic word for prayer). Silat techniques and Silat moves ('buah-buah Silat') form the basis of its movement. A Cekak practitioner does not dodge to the left or right or move backwards even one step; he or she moves forward when deflecting attacks. When awaiting an attack, a practitioner stands in an upright position (ready stance). A Cekak practitioner does not step forward, backwards, sideways, or stand in a fighting or sparring stance. emphasis is on self-defence and a practitioner only attacks when absolutely necessary for the purpose of safety. However, when a Cekak practitioner attacks, the opponent will not be able to evade the attack. If the opponent deflects the attack, a Cekak practitioner will counter strike and the enemy will definitely be defeated. there is no two-weapon system, if the enemy is armed, a Cekak practitioner will fight unarmed, using his or her bare hands. A Cekak practitioner aims to defeat the enemy by confiscating the enemy's weapon. there are no kicking techniques that are above the waistline. the focus is on trailing the opponent's movement and not parrying. By doing so, a Cekak exponent can take advantage of the opponent's strength to defeat him or her (Hanafi, 1973; Halimah, 1977; Md Radzi, 2019).

### **Passing The Art to The Rightful Heir**

The reason for authenticity and the rightful heir: although Silat does promote the dynamic style and various methods, it is needed for Silat to be passed on next generations with authentic knowledge, spirits and wisdom. This is to prevent fake and unauthorized entities from handing over knowledge in the rightful manner (Md Radzi, 2019).

### **Respect and Obedience in Silat Cekak Pusaka Hanafi**

Silat Cekak instils a deep respect for being respectful to one's teacher, being filial to one's mother/not disobeying one's mother, being filial to one's father/not disobeying one's father, not fighting with other members, and last but not least is not criticise other forms of authentic Malay Silat. The code of conduct emphasises the importance of the teaching and family institution as well as solidarity and bonds of brotherhood. Silat Cekak Pusaka Hanafi practitioners are also forbidden from condemning other forms of authentic Malay martial arts as this is a core value of living in a community (Hanafi, 1973; Halimah, 1977; Md Radzi, 2019).

### **Unity and Respect for Diversity**

As above mentioned, no fighting with other members, and no criticism of other forms of authentic Malay Silat. Thus, Silat Cekak promotes unity among practitioners and respect for other martial arts. It brings society together, fostering a sense of brotherhood and community (Hanafi, 1973; Halimah, 1977; Md Radzi, 2019).

### **Wisdom Trumps Speed**

The previous paper on Silat Cekak Pusaka Hanafi: A Legacy of Wisdom was presented by Md Radzi Hanafi (2019) mentioned that Silat Cekak taught a wisdom is more reliable than speed. It emphasises patience, strategy, and foresight in combat and life.

### **Preserving The Cultural Heritage of Silat**

Silat mirrors Malay identity for example Malay traditional suits, musical instruments and customs still is being used in official Royal ceremonies. Titles such as "Panglima" (warrior), Datuk and others are titles to demo Malay culture permanently in modern Malay institutes. Silat usually becomes an important event during Malay weddings, open ceremonies and official ceremonies by the Malaysian

government like coronation events and royal death events (Jabatan Warisan Negara). As practitioners, we have a task to preserve the cultural legacy and values of the Silat arts. We must ensure that this profound tradition continues to thrive as a symbol of Malay identity. Thus, three (3) important aspects need to be considered as follows: 1) preservation: maintain the art in its traditional form to pass down to the next generation, 2) diligent practice: continue to study and perfect the techniques and philosophical principals of Silat, and 3) active promotion: share the art with others to ensure its continued relevance and growth (Md Radzi, 2019).

Silat taught the practitioner to achieve the purpose of life by carrying out welfare and avoid yourself from despicable nature leading to society and self-damage. Through Silat, basic education embedded and strengthened the Malay socio-culture. Silat has been shown to make society successful with excellent characters and a spirit of love for the country, togetherness, respect for each other and high discipline. Silat practises contain elements of religion, language, customs, arts and history that are inherited from generation to generation. These elements combined led to Silat as the identity of the Malay race.

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