



CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS OF NON-MALAY SILAT PRACTITIONERS IN MALAY SILAT MALAYSIA

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Abstract: This article examines the Malay martial arts, Silat which consists of many types and varieties in different states and is also famous in Indonesia. However instead of having only Malay practitioners, there are also non-Malay practitioners learning these martial arts. Malay customs and cultures exist within this art of self-defense such as lime bathing ritual and recitation of verses from Quran. Thus, this study seeks to describe how Non-Malay practitioners acculturate themselves in Malay Silat, how they identify themselves, and what Silat habitus develops as time passed by from four Silat organizations in Kuching and Samarahan. This study also aims to investigate the significance of traditional Malay beliefs in today's Silat practice. It is hoped that this research can provide an enhanced understanding of Silat institution for the non-Malays and may combat the prejudice of how the non-Malays are accepted in a Malay martial arts institution where the non-Malays are minorities and provide discussions on Malay cultures and customs in Silat.

Keywords: Silat, Malay Martial Arts, Malay Cultures, Habitus, Acculturation, Cultural Adaptations

I. INTRODUCTION

Silat is a self-defense or martial arts that is well known in Malaysia and Indonesia; especially. Besides as a way to defend one's self it is also performed in ceremonies such as during official events, Malay weddings that are accompanied by musical instruments such as flute and drums. It symbolizes Malay identity as in Taekwondo for Korea and Karate for Japan. Wahab (1989) defines "Pencak Silat" as a form of self-defense knowledge that include specific methods of protecting oneself from physical injury when attacked with or without weapons. Soh (1991) states that Silat is a self-defense knowledge exclusively owned by Malay which does not only focus on elements of defending but elements of arts and Malay customs. Bakeri and Jais (2002) comment Silat as a unique manifestation of graceful movements of Silat exponent either as an art in the form of "Silat seni" or as tools of self-defense in form of Silat tempur. Karmuda (as cited in Ismail 2009) reported that the art of Silat is created in a process of evolution compatible to that of human experience that always interact with the natural environment that are full with enemies. There are many types of Silat in Malaysia based on different teachings, style, ideology and the Masters; such as Silat Cekak Hanafi, Silat Hailam Laut, Silat Helang Putih, Paris Dendam to mention a few.

Silat has no definite or specific history about its origin. Shamsuddin (2005), states that it is believed that Silat originated from ancient Malaysian and Indonesian civilization. Since there are many types of Silat there is no founder of this type of self-defence. It existed as far back as 7th century A.D. It was not until the 14th century Empire such as Malacca, Majapahit and Srivijaya that Silat was refined and become specialized martial arts of the Sultans and their "Panglima" and "Pendekar" (warriors). At that time, places such as Bali, Java, Malay Peninsula and Borneo were under the influence of these 14th century empires. When these empires are weak, Silat started to spread slowly throughout Southeast Asia. However, Ismail (2009,) states that it is believed to originate from Champa, where the Malays originally hail from and the historians also agree the existence of Malay kingdom in Champa. Furthermore, the findings of "keris" that approximately 2000 years old in Vietnam increase the likelihood that the art of Silat originates from Champa. Besides that, Silat Minangkabau in Sumatera has influence of Silat Champa. In fact in today's modern Silat in Peninsular Malaysia, the Silat which has Silat Champa elements is the Silat Gayong Fatini.

Kortomi (2011) developed different theories in Silat and its origin and cosmology. First, it is due to the spread of Old Malay culture, language and indigenous religion from time of Sumatra's Buddhist-Hindu kingdom of Swirijaya. Next theory which is even older states that Silat establishment is due to associations of Southeast Sumatrans' ancient indigenous religious beliefs, based on idea that not only