The Fighting Art of *Pencak Silat* and Its Music

*From Southeast Asian Village to Global Movement*

*Edited by*

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CHAPTER 3

Silat: A Muslim Traditional Martial Art in Southern Thailand

Bussakorn Binson

Introduction

In Thai nomenclature, silat has various written forms, e.g. zila, sila, shila, zilat, sila, shilat, and zzila. It can also be called dika, buedika, buezila, buerasila, padik, and bueradika. In this chapter, “silat” will be used in accordance with the Encyclopaedia of Cultures in Southern Thailand (Ruengnarong 1999:8029) to depict an art form that is a blend of martial arts, folk performing arts, sport, and an element of the ritual occult all belonging to the Muslim social group of the Malay Peninsula.

The most prominent martial art among Thai-Muslim communities in Southern Thailand is known as pencak silat. According to the Pattani Malay dialect - Thai Dictionary, “silat” is derived from “bersila” or “ssila” which means a form of traditional Malaysian martial art. Some linguists postulate that “silat” is derived from the Sanskrit word “shila” which means a fight to support honesty.

Silat spread northward from the Malay Peninsula into Southeast Asia several hundred years ago. Its origin, however, is still ambiguous among Thais due to the absence of written evidence. A few legends have been maintained over the generations by lineages of silat masters in Southern Thailand. Whilst the history of silat is neither clear nor concise, most scholars acknowledge the art form is the result of the blending of a mixture of religious influences from Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism and cultural influences from Indonesia, India, and China.

In this chapter the author will describe the characteristics of silat in Southern Thailand by describing its knowledge transfer and the related rites and beliefs in both practice and performance. Silat’s multifaceted role in traditional ceremonies, healing rites, Governmental occasions and sporting events within the Thai-Muslim community will also be explored.
Southern Thailand and the Malay Peninsula

Southern Thailand is a long peninsula flanked by two oceans, the Pacific with its Gulf of Thailand in the South China Sea on the east and to the south of Burma, the Indian Ocean with its Andaman Sea on the west.

The southern-most area of the country is connected to the Federation of Malaysia. This region is also known as the “Malay Peninsula” which comprises a cape that extends further out of mainland Asia, beginning at the narrowest part of the peninsula known as Kra Isthmus in Thailand’s Ranong and Choomporn provinces before continuing down to Malaysia and Singapore (Noonsook 1997:46–47).

Since the 9th century AD the Kingdom of Langkasuka, the centre of which was located at what is now the Pattani province, controlled a very important port on the sea route between the ‘western’ world and the ‘eastern’ world (Vallibhodom 1994:301).

With the arrival of merchants to the region, relationships grew between the native Malays and foreigners, including those from China, India, and the Middle East. Foreign merchants exposed the natives to their beliefs, visions, technologies, arts, languages, and religions, and one of earliest influences was the Brahman-Hindu religion from India.

At the end of the 9th century AD, the Kingdom of Sri Vijaya spread its influence over the former Langkasuka areas resulting in Malays converting to Buddhism. In the 14th century AD, that influence began to shift to the Muslim kingdom of Majapahit and the Malays adopted Javanese arts such as the way-ang shadow play, Javanese literature, and the making of kris daggers (see Figure 3.1).

Pasai, or what was also formerly known as Samudera Darussalam, was a Muslim state on the north coast of Sumatra, between the 13th and the 15th centuries. In Aceh province on the island of Sumatra, there is evidence of Islamic migration into that area of the Malay Peninsula.

In the 14th or 15th century another Islamic Kingdom, that of Malacca, rose to power and Islam in Southeast Asia began to thrive. Malacca soon extended the Islamic influences along with its political and economic co-operation into the Kingdom of Pattani by the end of the 15th century AD when Pattani was a Colony of Malacca. At that time the king of Pattani changed the state’s religion from Buddhism to Islam and proclaimed Pattani an official Islamic State as it was later described as “Serambi Mekah” (a balcony of Mecca) and one of the best centers [sic] in Islamic propagation in the Malay Peninsula” (Haji Abdul Halim 1994:192).
During the age of Western colonization and the time of Thailand’s King Rama V (1853–1910), Thailand had to surrender the States of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu to Great Britain under the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909. This event physically separated a unified ancient cultural Kingdom leading to its disintegration. The examination of evidence from various time periods reveals that the historical base of the Malay Peninsula and especially the Pattani Kingdom is comprised of several diverse cultures, namely Hindu, Hindu-Javanese, Javanese-Malay, and other Islamic derived cultures. This mixture created a new culture unique to the Malays on the Peninsula that now includes the southern-most Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. This cultural blend led to societal changes in governance and religions, culminating in the cultural identity and tradition of Muslims in the region today.

Most of the population of Thailand’s three southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat comprise Muslim Malays speaking the Malay-Pattani language written using the *Jawi* alphabet adapted from Arabic. The cultural traditions of the Malays in these provinces relate closely to the Islamic code of conduct, such as the reading of the Qur’an, the notion of submission to Allah, and following the practice of circumcision. Their traditions also include the ceremonies found during the month-long fast known as *Ramadan* that ends in *Hari Raya Day*. When all of these religious features are taken together they form the basic concepts of Malay culture.

**Silat in Southern Thailand**

The *silat* exhibited influences from the cultures of India, Indonesia, Malaysia and ancient Persia, which is now called Iran. Many different forms of *silat* can be found in the Muslim communities in Thailand’s southern-most provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat as well as the Saba-yoy and Thebha districts from the Songkhla province at its northern reaches, and with southern forms down through Malaysia and Indonesia (Pongpaiboon, 2000:136).

Despite movements of offence and attack, practitioners of *silat* must agree to only use the art in self-defence and strive to maintain their self-discipline.

In Southeast Asia competitive *silat* is called *pencak silat*, which is Indonesian terminology meaning a form of martial art using one’s bare hands and feet while flowing in artfully elegant dance movements. *Pencak silat* was accepted as a contest event in the 14th ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Games held at Jakarta, Indonesia in 1987 after the first general meeting of The Federation of International *Pencak Silat* in 1986 established rules and regula-
tions for contests. Then in 1994 Thailand hosted the *Pencak Silat* World Championship in Hat Yai district, Songkhla Province.

**Legends of Silat**

Legends and chronicles concerning the *silat* art form collected from various sources are as follows: Mubin Sheppard (1972:140) a historian of Malaysian culture and heritage, claims that the martial art known as *silat* was invented 400 years ago. As the legend states, three young men from the island of Sumatra, named Burhanuddin, Shamsuddin, and Aminuddin, went from Minangkabang on the west coast of Sumatra to Aceh on the north eastern side of the Island to study the new religion. Their teacher's house was located in the forest near a pool fed by a waterfall. A *Bongor* tree in full bloom was nearby. One day when Aminuddin was fetching water and filling his water jar, he noticed a blossom moving in the water. He saw a re-occurring battle between the spray from the falling water assisted by the fluctuating breeze pushing the blossom outward, while the whirlpool created by the falls drew it inwards towards its vortex. Aminuddin was so captivated by the spiralling nature of the blossom's dynamics that he put down his full bamboo water carrier and watched for a long time.

When eventually the blossom circled close to him, he plucked it from the water and as he did so, he thought he heard a voice from the *Bongor* tree reminding him to learn from and teach others about the blossom's display. “On that morning *silat* was born.” The young man Aminuddin returned with the blossom and adapted its floating spiral actions into defensive dance movements with his friends. Together they invented a set of arm and leg movements for protection.

When the three men returned home, each became a teacher of Islam and a trainer of their newly invented martial art. There was much public interest and many came to be trained in this new martial art known as *silat*, which lead to its widespread regional popularity.

Thailand’s Department of Physical Education (1997:298) reports that *silat* was derived from another martial art invented during a time of war in Mecca, Saudi Arabia named *dika*. *Dika* was created by a major in the army of Nabi Mahamad named Saidina-ulen and his younger brother Saidina-alan who practised together until they were adept and then taught it to the soldiers. Initially, *dika* was a bare-hands form of fighting and later during wartime it

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incorporated the *kris* dagger and dual short swords, whilst retaining its original stances. With the passage of time, *dika* dispersed widely among the commoners including the Arab merchants who took it, along with Islam, to Java. The original *dika* was then adapted and improved to be the *dika* or *silat* of the Muslims currently residing on the Malaysian Peninsula.

One myth involves the tale from Thailand's Songkla Province of a *silat* master who arrived from Java and spent his whole life teaching the *silat* in the Pattani Province Southern Thailand.\(^2\) Chlertphet (1999:40–41) states that King Raman of Java sent two soldiers to fetch a treasure and bring it back safely to his palace. During the journey, the two soldiers were attacked by a group of bandits. The soldiers fought off the bandits utilizing their martial art skills while protecting the treasure. Back at the palace, the two soldiers were lionized and appointed as Masters of the *silat* martial art and became trainers for all of King Raman's soldiers, which led to its perpetuation into the modern age.

Sitthiphan (1982:420) claimed that *silat* is a martial art of the Minangkabau people from the island of Sumatra, and it was later disseminated to the Malay Peninsula and Southern Thailand. During the reign of Sultan Muzaffar Syah (1445 - 1459) an army of one thousand Pattani soldiers who were adept in close-range combat featuring the *kris* dagger were sent to assist the Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya in its war with Burma. During the reign of Sultan Ismail Shah of Pattani (1500–1530), *Dika* was taught along with the Islamic code of conduct at a School of martial art place named Bunnangpuje (Nateplub 2006:55). Malepeng Bola, *silat* master from the Pattani Province stated that:

> There were three brothers lost in the forest. One brother named Yuso was resting high up in the tree as a refuge to be safe from tigers. One night he saw a band of tigers where the elder was teaching the younger ones how to capture their prey. He revealed how a successful predator moves and how one avoids being captured. Then when Yuso returned to his village he recounted the tiger's movements to his brothers. Together, they blended the tiger's movements forming a new martial art known as *silat* (cited in Leaduwe 2537:75).

Nisoh Nilaw, born in 1952, *silat* master in the Pattani Province, related his belief in the stories that the *silat* originated in Indonesia and then spread to Malaysia and Thailand. He stated that:

\(^2\) Hajyesuko Makarem, interviewed and cited by Chlertphet (1999:45).
I learned *silat* with my teacher, Mr. Tuan Luebeh, who resided in the Kapongtusong village, Lammai Tambon, Mueng Yala District, of the Yala Province. He in turn, learned the *silat* from Mr. Haji Awae who was from the town of Besut in the Malaysian state of Terengganu. While Mr. Tuan Luebeh’s father was taught the *silat* when he was in the Malaysian state of Melacca. *Silat* artists believed that the origin of *silat* might have come from Java then to Malaysia and Thailand later (Nilaw, interview, 2 June 2011).

Niseng Salaeh,³ born in 1961, presently living in Pattani Province, stated that:

My grandmother, Jayyoh told me that her grandfather, Mr. Jaykoh, immigrated from Pasir Mas, Kelantan, Malaysia and their first ancestors in the family who performed *silat* well, were named Perli Mordaoh and Perli Mohjaepae. Once they were accused of disobeying the governor and punished by being forced to eat dirty rice husks. After that they relocated to the Songkhla Province and gave *silat* performances in many places over the years. Perli Mordaoh has since passed away and Perli Mohjaepae has disappeared (interview, 23 June 2011).

Tuanmah Muelae, born in 1948, *silat* master in the Yala Province, conveyed the following myth on the origins of *silat*:

There was Teemoh, a daughter of a *raja* (king or prince) on the islands of Java had an overly jealous husband named Uma who hardly ever let her out of the house. One day, Teemoh went to a pool to take a bath where there was a shama bird perched on a pole. When Lady Teemoh waved her hand to chase the bird away, the bird jumped at her abdomen and Teemoh slapped at it. The bird then flew to her brow where Teemoh raised her hand to capture it. The bird circled around her and Teemoh turned around and around after it. The pair fled and chased like this for some time until Uma, who was getting suspicious and angry that Teemoh had been gone for so long, took a rod to the pool looking for his wife. When Uma found Teemoh, he angrily swung at her many times with the rod, but missed her every time. Teemoh in quickly using her bird catching stances, could duck and dodge away until finally Uma was tired and

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³ Mr. Niseng Salaeh was born on the 15th November, 1961. At the time of writing he was living at Yaring District, Pattani Province.
stopped trying to hit his wife. Consequently, her bird catching stances became the prototypes for the *silat* (interview, 23 June 2011).

Kordey Salamae, born in 1929, *silat* master residing in the Yueroh village of Yala Province stated he was told that *silat* originated in Java and spread to the Malay Peninsula and the southern part of Thailand. He said:

I was told by many *silat* masters that they went to study *silat* in Malaysia before returning to teach it in their hometowns in Thailand (interview, 12 June 2011).

Local scholars accept that *silat* was first intended as a means for defending yourself in the battlefields of war and was later developed into a martial art for merchants to protect themselves and their goods from bandits. Over time *silat* was known among the locals that it became a local sport and a performance in Thai-Muslim rituals where this martial art with its distinctive artistic movements was developed to represent Malay culture. Today’s *silat* is promoted as a sport with universal rules and regulations.

Thai *silat* performers continue to travel to the Malaysian States of Kelantan and Terengganu to study there. Consequently, *silat* performances in Southern Thailand today are still related to *silat* performances in these Malaysian States. Some of the Malaysian *silat* instructors have immigrated to Southern Thailand’s provinces of Songkhla, Pattani, and Narathiwat.

The above-mentioned legends and chronicles concerning the history of *silat* in both Thailand and the Malay Peninsula propose two possible origins. The first is that *silat* originated in Arabia and its merchants brought it to the Malay Peninsula. The second is that *silat* originated from the Indonesian island of Sumatra with its folk legends related to the movement of flowers, animals and battles from the past. Regardless as to where *silat* originated, it has been influenced, modified, and blended with other martial arts such as the *kalaripayattu* from Southern India along with the *kuntao* and *kung-fu* martial arts from China among other combat and dance practices. Through multiple interactions, *silat* has transformed into the flowing, artistic fighting movements present today (Thailand’s Department of Physical Education 1997:298).

**Categories of Silat**

*Silat* martial arts and performances have been categorized by a variety of people and the *silat* masters from Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat in Southern
Thailand categorise silat in a variety of ways. According to my observations during my fieldwork, silat masters in each village have explained the types of silat differently. The descriptions from the interviews can be seen below:

Nisoh Nilaw⁴ states that silat can be divided into four types according to the tempo of the movements: Silat Tari Yuema consisting of medium-paced movements, Silat Tari Lagoh Galae with its fast sequences, Silat Tari Eena with its slow, flowing and beautiful movement sets, and Sila Tari Sapaelae with its very quick manoeuvres of a warrior in a battle (interview, 5 July 2011).

Kordey Salamae⁵ declared that silat performances can be divided into two types by the artist’s gender. One silat is performed by men and can sometimes include the kris daggers tucked into the left front of their waistbands. The other silat is ibughayong, which is performed by women (Ibu refers to females, the word meaning ‘mother’ in Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia) and the fighting movements are comprised of quick dodges and changes of balance similar to the character of Chinese kung fu (interview, 2 June 2011).

Bueraheng Laegnaenae⁶ suggested that silat can be divided into three types which are differentiated in their movement sets and whether they use kris daggers, swords or are bare-handed. There are the gayong mat (bare hands), gayong paelae (kris daggers), and the gayong leeyae (swords). According to Mr. Laegnaenae, the experts of the gayong paelae silat and the gayong leeyae silat have unfortunately all passed away without any successor, leaving only the gayong mat silat (interview, 23 June 2011).

Multiple silat artists have provided two general groupings of silat. One described a silat that uses the movements of the hands, arms, and legs with the objective of entertaining the audience, whilst the second is one that features weapons and especially the kris dagger in modes of both attack and defence. Reongnon (1984:115) categorizes silat into three types: Silat yatoh relates to silat performed as a contest using the rules of attack and defense, which means that when one contestant attacks, his opponent has to be able to successfully defend against that attack or he will lose. Secondly, silat tari pertains to a silat featuring graceful bare-hand stances and movement sequences choreographed to the music’s tempo, which is usually performed for Kings or other high-ranking officers. The third is the silat kayor which is usually performed at night with the kris dagger for entertainment purposes (interview, 23 June 2011).

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⁴ Mr. Nisoh Nilaw is a Silat master and a farmer who was born in 1952 and is living in the Nongjig District of the Pattani Province.
⁵ Mr. Kordey Salamae is a farmer born in 1929 residing in the Yueroh village of the Yala Province.
⁶ Mr. Bueraheng Laegnaenae Silat artist, born in 1928 lives at 17 Moo 5, Tambon Loo-boh-baya, Yi-ngaw district, Narathiwat province.
Pramoon Uthaipan (1989:355–356) also states that the silat is categorized into three types: Silat taghina refers to silat with elegant dance-like sequences performed with the accompaniment of slow tempo music; silat yawor is a silat dance with a kris dagger performed within a bird procession; and silat for fighting.7

Interviews with silat artists revealed that they view the silat as having either two or more forms. From the author’s perspective there are three forms when considering the performance objectives. The silat Dance aims to highlight the dramatic features of the silat’s movements, poses and its transitions. This dance category includes both solo and pair performances whereas the second classification is the silat duel or its competitive fighting form. In this type, the opponents can be either one group against another or simply between individuals. The competition itself may be real or an entertaining demonstration for the audience. The third form is the ritual silat that is held upon three occasions. One is during a shamanic sickness healing rite and the other is during the ritual of paying homage to one’s teacher and all the silat masters throughout history known as a wai kru ceremony. The third is where the shaman either performs himself or functions as the master of ceremonies with a hired silat troupe to reward and honour one’s ancestors after a wish request has been fulfilled. Traditionally in these wish requests of getting a job, having a baby, or having a child pass a school’s entrance exam etc., the family directs their plea to their ancestors with the promise that if they fulfil the wish, they will honour and reward them with a silat performance.

The author’s fieldwork discovered that prior to each silat performance, fight, or ritual a wai kru ceremony is conducted that features a movement sequence that is repeated while facing each of the four compass cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West). This is a protective custom to ward off evil coming from all directions.8 Furthermore, silat artists believe that by showing respect to their teacher during the wai kru it will ensure their success during the performance. Wai means respect while kru is the word for teacher, ancestral silat masters, and one’s spiritual teacher or guru. It is a traditional pre-performance rite that contributes to their confidence and safety that silat artists maintain no matter what type of silat they perform. Contemporary Thai silat artists still retain their traditional spiritual beliefs and practices in this unique ancient art form.

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7 The last name of Silat was not mentioned by the author.
8 Editors’ note: See “Introduction,” paragraph 7 “Seeking internal power” for a detailed discussion of this movement formula that can be met in diverse local traditions of pencak silat in Southeast Asia.
**Kris Dagger (weapon used in Silat)**

*Kris* is the Javanese word for an asymmetrical dagger. In the dialect of the Yala Province, it is called “*karue-reh.*” A *kris* has a double-edged blade averaging 12–16 inches. Some have a distinctive wavy blade comprised of three bends, which is called “*kod kris*” in Thai. The grip and sheath is usually exquisitely carved. Some grips may be decorated with silver, gold, or copper, according to the owner’s preference.

In terms of the Raman *kris*, a local scholar Tipali Atabu from the Talohalo Sub-District of the Yala Province explained that about 250 years ago the Governor of the Raman District (also in the Yala Province) wished to have the *kris* as the weapon and product of his district. He invited the Indonesian craftsman known as “Bundaisara” to come and forge the *kris* daggers for him in Raman. This collaboration led to the development of the Raman style of *kris* with the grips being carved in the form of a Pangka bird’s head (Figure 3.1).

The Pangka, which also goes by the name of *Katen* by the Thai Muslim *silat* performers, was reportedly chosen according to an oral legend due to its quick reflexes – a very desirable trait for *silat* performers. It is in the Kingfisher family. It is also believed to be one of the birds featured in the Buddhist *Himmapan* Forest legend. The *kris* dagger used in the *silat* from Southern Thailand has the usual crook-necked handle of a *kris*, but carved in the shape of the Pangka bird with its palm end being the beak and the wider base end depicting its head. These daggers became known as “Bundaisara” after their imported craftsmen.

![Figure 3.1 Pangka birds head on the kris handle (photo taken by A. Kinear).](image)
The art of *kris* dagger making has been passed down through the generations until the present day where descendants of the original workgroup fabricate a *kris* only upon a client’s request. The process is a blend of metallurgy and spirituality as the craftsmen follow ancient guidelines of mental concentration, breath control and auspicious timing of initiating and completing the dagger. A fault at any point means that the craftsman has to scrap his work and begin anew.

Tipali Atabu has also formed a guild of selected *kris* makers to preserve this tradition. With their high quality standards both in craftsmanship and personal behaviour they are role models for the youth in the community. These daggers are well-respected not only locally, but to those in Malaysia and adjacent countries. Making these daggers is one of the distinguished professions in Yala Province.

The *kris* dagger is a weapon and a universal symbol of protection that resides as an altar centrepiece in the homes of the Thai-Muslim community. Although the *kris* dagger itself has remained the same over time, it has become one of the emblems of the *silat kris* performance.

**Silat Kris**

A “*silat kris*” performance can be viewed today throughout Thailand’s three southern-most provinces. The contemporary performance reflects influences from Indonesia through Malaysia.

In the past the elaborate *kris* daggers were considered the crown jewels of the Malaysian and Indonesian Kings. A former French Ambassador by the name of Simon de la Loubère⁹ wrote in “Du Royaume de Siam,” after traveling to Thailand, that the *kris* was included as one of the Thai weapons during the reign of Somdet Phra Narai Maharat (1636–1688) and the King specified his men wear it under the left side of their waist bands (Loubère, 1705:75).

Laegnaenae mentioned that the Malay people also have a legend where a warrior with a *kris* made with a very wavy blade became a great general of the army (interview, 2012).

During the seminar on the “Kris” arranged by the Ministry of Culture and the Foundation of Sookkaew Kaewdang on the 8–9 June 2011 held in the Narathiwat Province, a policy declaration was made to revive the *silat kris* performance. Officials realized that it was their duty to support the development

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⁹ He served in Thailand between 27 September 1680 - 3 January 1688.
of the art form’s physical exercises and to use it in the community’s educational institutions.

Some academies in the Narathiwat Province have expressed an interest in developing their knowledge of the *silat kris*. They use the movements and sequences of the *kris* dances and the *silat kris* in aerobic classes. They have planned to bring together instructors from the physical education departments with the local *silat* experts to develop programmes based on the traditional movements and spread them throughout the communities.

With the help of its cultural institutions, Narathiwat Province has targeted three groups. The first is the schools with their physical education teachers, serving as both *silat* aerobic trainers and publicists. The second target is at the sub-district administration level. This level refers to where the community’s sport leaders in a variety of organizations become trainers and publicists. The third is the district-wide groups with the Sheriffs (*palad tesaban muang*) as
policy planners and training course managers of the *silat kris* art form in an effort to spread it to community’s youth.

The essentials of *silat* aerobics are divided into three categories: the warm up sequences for stretching and the faster manoeuvres and sequences for exercising while ending with the slower ones as a ‘warm down’ to prevent injuries to the muscles. The three categories are designed and based on the policy of the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2008. If it is successfully developed and brought into everyday practical use, the youth are expected to express more interest in the traditional *silat* art form. After the implementation of these new regional school policies it is hoped that they will lead to greater ties between *silat* masters and the instructors as well as an increase in the recognition of the *silat* art form among the younger generation.

**Attire of Silat Performers**

In local *silat* contests each performers usually dresses with a hood or a *kapiyo* cap, a rounded or high collar shirt, a pair of long pants topped with a *sarong* (*sor-kae* or Batik cloth), a waist band (*lue-pak* cloth) or a belt to tighten and hold the *sarong* while leaving their feet bare.

For *silat* performed in ceremonies, the performers usually dress in the Malaysian style with rounded or high collar shirts (*tue loh bla ngor*) worn over the top of their waist clothes (*likat*), but no waistband, and *sor-kae* caps or head turbans (*sata-ngae* cloth). (Chlertphet, 1999:42–46). These styles of *silat* dress (see Figures 3.3–3.5) can be found in the Narathiwat, Pattani, Satun and Yala provinces.

Some *silat* troupes dress in a style that includes a plain white or black T-shirt or one with the troupe’s name on it, long straight pants topped with a sarong featuring beautiful motifs, a colourful waist band, a head turban, and a *kris* dagger tucked in on one side.

The musicians may dress in the same way as the performers or in a Muslim style. Each male musician dresses in a shirt or T-shirt with a sarong or long pants. All female *silat* performers follow the Muslim rules of dress. However, there are females in some *silat* troupes who now dress the same as their male counterparts.
Figure 3.3 The attire of silat troupes from Narathiwat Province

Figure 3.4 Sarong (Sor-kae or Batik cloth) with a waist band (Lue-pak cloth)
A *silat* performance is accompanied by music whose tempo is congruent with its fast or slow fighting movements. Each *silat* troupe in the studied areas may use different kinds of musical instruments, however essentially they all include an oboe(s) for the melody, drums for the main tempo, and a gong for the tempo control (see Figure 3.6).

In Southern Thailand, two types of oboes (a double reed aerophone) are used in *silat*: the long oboe or *pee hor*, which is the most popular in the Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat provinces; and the *sunai* or *sunwa* oboe, which is popular in the Songkhla, Pattani and Satun provinces. Both kinds of oboes are categorized as Javanese oboes as they originated from Java, (Chalertphet, 1999:51). Some however, may simply be called Indian oboes because their shape is similar to that of the *shehnai*. Figures 3.7a and 3.7b show the comparative shapes of the two oboes.

The musicians often name their oboes according to the performances they accompany. For example, oboes used in a *ka-loh* performance – a band consists of an oboe, two pairs of drums and a gong, used in the death ritual parade, is

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*FIGURE 3.5* *Silat masters from Yala province*
called *pee ka-loh* (*kaloh* oboe), while an oboe used in a *silat* performance is known as a *pee silat* (*silat* oboe).

Another instrument used in a *silat* performance is a single gong. It may be large or small, and is often decorated with motifs such as moons, stars, and *kris* daggers (see Figure 3.8).

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**Figure 3.6** *Silat music troupe from Narathiwat province*

**Figure 3.7**  
*a.* *Silat oboe; b.* *Shenai.*
With drums (*glong thon*), two are used, one big and one small. Each drum has two ends; one is hit with the hand and the other end with a stick. The larger drum is referred as ‘mother drum’ (*glong thon mae*) and with its loud bass tone is used to mark the tempos, while the smaller one – ‘child drum’ (*glong thon luuk*), with its higher pitch – is used for melodies, mimicking and adding semitones.

The music piece during a *silat* performance is known as Grand *Sarama* by some artists, while most simply refer to it as *silat*. The song is categorized as an Indian *Sarama* song with a Yala *Sarama* melody (Yala province), which means that one melody is played throughout the song, but with an adjustable tempo.

The piece begins and ends with a short overture which is called *Taboh* and is played as pay homage to the music masters. The opening overture is followed by a musical passage played in moderato for the *silat*’s performers to also pay homage to their great masters.

During the fighting performances the music has a fast tempo – *Layu*. These elements and steps of the background music performance are as used...
by the Phigoonthong silat troupe of the Pattani province (interview, 30 Jan 2012).

The typical musical ensemble for a silat performance is comprised of three types of percussion and a Thai oboe that can be called either sunai, suna, sunwa or hor. Although the specific names of the silat oboe vary by region, all of the terms are understood by the musicians.

One percussionist plays a ‘gong’ that is considered the ‘Father’ of the ensemble. His role is to be steady and even. The two other percussionists play double-headed drums where one head of each is struck with a wooden beater that produces a low tone and the other with the hand, producing a high tone.

The two drums also have names related to the separate tones they produce. The larger of these drums is called (BM) gendang ibu, the ‘Mother’ where its bigger face producing a low tone is called ‘Da,’ while the smaller side, with its high tone produced with the wooden beater is called ‘Ja.’ The smaller drum is called (BM) gendang anak – ‘the Child’ – and the lower tone hit with the beater is called ‘Ding’ while its higher tone is named ‘Pa.’ These onomatopoetic sounds are commonly used in Thai music from all regions and can be varied.

During the course of a performance the musical roles of these three percussionists are said to reflect the familial roles of home life from whence they draw their names. The father is even and steady while the mother escorts her child. This is a well-known metaphor among silat troupes in Southern Thailand.

Musical Analysis

This score (see Figure 3.9) was transcribed (with permission) from a recording of the Sayati Yasman troupe’s performance at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand on the 21 July, 2011. The troupe is from the Yi-ngaw district of Thailand’s Narathiwat Province.

The sunai (oboe) plays an ornamental role and the instrumentalist has freedom to improvise. The pitch used in this performance utilizes a Db pentatonic scale. After a short rubato, or relatively free introduction, the ‘father’ gong begins to mark the time in an invariant pattern that is notated as the two strong beats in a 2/4 measure.

This transcription begins at the 36.9’ mark of the performance, at which time a steady ‘metronomic’ pulse has already been established and the sunai (oboe) has re-entered. From this point the rhythm, pitch, and loudness all steadily increase.

10 Niseng Salaeh is the leader of Silat troupe from Pattani Province.
The ‘father’ gong, which is notionally playing a metronomic pulse, provides a guide to the gradually but steadily increasing tempo of the performance. At the point of the performance at which the transcription begins, the first bar to be notated is 2.6' in duration. Then, after it is repeated twelve additional times, the final notated bar is 1.5 seconds. The tempo over this period of twelve repeated bars increases by an average of approximately 0.10 second of a second per bar.

The transcription demonstrates that the ensemble increases its tempo in a measured and uniform way. This increase in tempo occurs across all instruments of the ensemble. The ability to maintain ensemble unity is considered a reflection of the highly developed mastery of this music style by the performers.
According to *silat* master Mr. Salaeh, when the ensemble is paying homage to their instructors, the tempo is always slow in order to show respect with a peaceful and humble mind.

From the author’s observation it was found that the role of musical performances is to accompany the tempo of the *silat* artist’s movements. The gong leads the ensemble in these tempo changes to reflect those of the artist. There is no signalling involved. It just requires intense observation on the part of the musician and their quick reflexes (Salamae interview, 2 June 2011).

**Rites and Beliefs Related to the Silat Performance**

The following are three important rites closely paired to *silat* with the purpose of paying homage to its great masters.

*Paying Homage to Silat Instructors*

The aspiring student performs a rite before their enrolment under the *silat* master to show their respect. In the ritual, students are required to honour their instructor with a tray of offerings comprised of the following:

- One whole roasted chicken which represents the whole body of *silat* knowledge and it is more respectful to provide the whole of something rather than an incomplete portion;
- Twelve candles that represent the brightness of one’s future in learning the *silat* through the light they provide. The number twelve denotes two facets. One is the twelve months of the year and the other is for the *Shia* branch of Islam that worships the twelve *Imams* or deputies under *Allah* (Sutthiwong et al., 2000:55–57);
- Popped rice represents, through its absorption of oil during cooking, that the student similarly absorbs the knowledge of *silat* from their instructor;
- An assortment of flowers where their beauty epitomizes the audience’s appreciation for the attractiveness of the flowing movements of the *silat*;
- Money in the amount of 25–100 baht11 for the instructor to be well fed.

It was also found that in some areas other items are given in addition to those listed above. For some a ring is given to symbolize the never-ending nature of the *silat* as it continues forever from the past into the future. Once one has entered the *silat* circle they are expected to continue for life. A piece of white

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11 These gifts of reverence will vary among the schools.
cloth can be given that represents the student’s sincerity, purity, and openness to learn with no colour from their own ego. A white cloth is chosen as it is by its very nature, self-evidently clean. Then lastly, a bowl of white and yellow sticky rice may be added with a white half on one side symbolizing the student’s pure mind and yellow as embodying the sincerity of a monk, who typically dons robes in this colour. It is also believed that the turmeric that imparts this yellow colour in sticky rice protects one from stomach ailments. Moreover, sticky rice itself is used to embody the student’s strong desire to retain or ‘hold on to’ what is taught.

In some silat schools, the new student brings a wooden box filled with betel nuts and leaves, a length of white cotton cloth, a knife, and 15 baht to their instructor as gifts of reverence. The trainer keeps the cloth, knife, and coins while returning the wooden box.

For the Phigoonthong silat troupe of the Pattani Province new students brings the trainer a bowl containing three bunches of prepared betel sets, a candle, and cash amounting to 24 baht (Nateplub, 2006:136). Then, the new students are sworn in. After the student gives his tray of offerings, the master will make a recitation while symbolically bestowing them to all ancestors of silat. The recitation is a request of the ancient silat masters to allow him to accept the new student. Niseng Salaeh described his training:

Before beginning the full course, the students are required to give the teacher the ‘perkuera’ which is a set of offerings consisting of Betel nut pieces, oil in a shell, an egg and a candle. Also a practice area is set up in the form of a trapezium at 3.5 metres wide and 3.6 metres long. In its middle a hole 0.5 metres wide and deep is dug. At the east of the practice area, there will be a bamboo bench with yellow and white flags and a pillar. The exit will be made close to the north-east corner, whereas the entrance will be made close to the south-west corner. On the bamboo bench, the student places his offerings. The band stays in the same area. Before the practice, the teacher will recite a prayer and mix the paddy with turmeric. Then, he will throw the paddy onto the ground at the same time as the music begins playing. This signifies the end of the opening ceremony of silat training (interview, 22 July 2011).

Niseng Salaeh also stated that at the end of the silat course of instruction, which takes 40 days of serious practice, there is another rite of gratitude to honour the master instructor. It also serves to prophesy whether each student will be a successful silat artist or not. In this prophetic rite, a hole is dug in the silat arena where each student cuts the throat of his votive chicken and lets it
loose to stagger around. The owner of the chicken that falls into the hole is predicted to prosper in performing the *silat*. This rite ends with the instructor reciting the *du’a* (blessing) to wish all of his students good luck in their future. The last step is the graduation ceremony that is arranged at the *silat* master’s house and is held between the sixth and ninth lunar months. In this ceremony the graduating students receive a hair washing cloth to indicate the successful completion of their *silat* training and are now entitled to transfer the art form on to others.

Apart from practising the movements of *silat*, the students will also learn the traditional rituals related to the supernatural powers, spirits of instructors, guardian spirits, and *kru mhor tayai* (which is a collective name for all *silat*’s ancestors). The author found that many of the instructor homage rituals in *silat* are similar to those practised in other Thai martial arts such as Thai kick boxing, sword fighting and even similar to those conducted by traditional musicians. Together these rites reflect a core Buddhist belief where one’s instructor is held in a position of respect second only to one’s parents. With this similarity, one could also surmise that cultures have become mixed, communities have intermingled, and practices have been adopted from one group to another. The offerings presented in the *wai kru* rite reflect the blending of Animist, Buddhist, and Islamic beliefs.

*Paying Homage to Silat’s Great Ancestral Masters and Land’s Guardian Spirits*

One traditional belief of *silat* artists in Southern Thailand is the belief in its great masters and the land’s guardian spirits. Before a hired *silat* troupe ventures to the performance venue they need to follow a prescribed sequence of traditional steps. First before leaving, the *silat* musicians have to bestow a bowl of betel nuts for *silat*’s past master musicians, to honour them, in their home. They then proceed to perform the *silat* song\(^ {12} \) three times to inform them and the land’s guardian spirits of their upcoming trip. There is also a prayer to the guardian spirits to protect them until they return home again. Moreover, this performance is used as signal to call their troupe and to let the village know they have been hired to perform.

Once they reach the vicinity, the patron is required to perform an invitational rite by bringing offerings of betel nuts and leaves to the leader of the *silat* troupe so as to ‘inform’ the great masters of the *silat* and the land’s guardian spirits about where the troupe will perform.

\(^ {12} \) This song is not identical with the Grand *Sarana* piece.
After the troupe’s leader has finished this local rite, the musicians again play the song three more times. Immediately prior to the beginning of the performance, the silat leader or the host will light the candles and raise the bowl of offerings over his head while reciting verbal spells in reverence, to invite silat’s great masters and their ancestors. The troupe leader will touch the bowl of offerings to the gong, oboe and the two Thon drums after which the overture will begin. The silat song is played three more times as an overture to the performance.

The fighters pay homage to silat’s great ancestral masters by performing special movement sequences from the four cardinal directions of the compass. This ritual activity serves to warm-up both the fighter’s mind and body for the upcoming fight. It also reveals his level of confidence and preferred strategies to the audience and his opponent.

Along with the four directions the fighter recites four prayers, which include a pardon to opponents, protection from enemies, popularity among neighbours, and popularity among audiences. This pre-performance rite is performed according to tradition with the intention of acknowledging both the great masters that invented the silat art form and the beneficence of one’s personal silat instructor.

At the end of the silat performance, the musicians again play the silat song three times in order to finalize the show and make a symbolic farewell. When the troupe arrives home, they conclude with the musicians playing the song another three times to apprise the great masters and the land’s guardian spirits of their safe arrival.

Every one to three years, whenever it is convenient for the troupe, a ceremony is arranged to commemorate one’s ancestors and the silat masters who have passed away. Although according to the interviewees the paying of respects to other entities besides Allah is considered against Islamic laws, they support their cross-cultural traditions of their ancestors from the Malay Peninsula. These ancestors reflect the ancient blending of Hinduism and Buddhism, which existed in that region with the acceptance of the belief in a relationship between the supernatural and humans. Hence these homage rituals of silat exhibit traces of the historic Thai Muslim culture that exists in southern Thailand.

Although most silat homage rituals are concerned with honouring deceased masters, silat itself, outside of the shamanic healing silat, is reserved primarily for celebration and is never performed during funerals.
Rites Related to the Silat Shaman

A silat shaman is one who uses silat as one of his shamanic implements in relieving those believed to be possessed by evil spirits or an ancestor, locating a lost item, or fulfilling a votive prayer.

In the case of illness the family will arrange for a shaman to come and perform a silat to hopefully appease the causative spirits. Sometimes a shaman will invite the possessing spirit to perform the silat against another provided opponent if it desires. In another situation, one may enlists a shaman's assistance in making a votive prayer to pass an important entrance exam. Then if it met with success, the patron will hire a shaman again to show his appreciation to the spirits with a silat performance.

Another ritual conducted by a silat shaman has the aim of finding his replacement when he is getting old and wants to retire from his spiritual duties. The shaman invites silat performers and witnesses along with the spirits of his shamanic ancestors. The ritual itself varies greatly among individual shamans. However, at some point the invited spirits, indicating that he is the intended successor to continue shamanic services within the community, will possess one of the silat artists.

Beliefs Surrounding Silat Music

There are beliefs and restrictions associated with silat that must be followed by its musicians. In some areas it is believed that the whole set of instruments need to be kept together as a group at all time, even during transport. Furthermore, one cannot use their instrument in another troupe as that would violate the preceding rule, but there is no such restriction on the players.

According to silat traditions, the instruments are held to be members of a family, where they are harmonious when played together, but problems would arise if they were located with a different family, leading to an unpolished performance and erroneous playing. In general it is expected that instruments will be handled with respect. That includes it is forbidden to step over any musical instrument as an extension of the Buddhist belief that the feet are the lowest and the least clean parts of the body.

The instruments are believed to be instilled with the spirit of music gurus. If one violates those rules it is expected that some misgivings will occur, in the form of sickness or accident. A rite of apology must be undertaken immediately to mitigate any such transgression by bestowing prepared betel nuts and water in one's pardon to the great silat masters.
From the above one observes that the offerings in *silat* rites are common, locally available items people that use and consume such as, sticky rice, chicken, eggs, betel nut, white cloth, locally patterned cloth, and money in differing amounts. However, during the graduation ceremony the graduates need to kill a chicken by cutting its neck to fulfil the wish of a supernatural being as this ritual intends to please the spirits so the graduate will be treated well in the future. There are also some prohibitions associated with *silat*’s musicians. And musical instruments are considered sacred because the musicians have the sense of gratitude towards them in being a tool for earning income. The troupe’s instruments must always travel and play together with best care to ensure the instruments remain playable prior to a performance.

Furthermore, the traditional rite of playing a *silat* overture two separate times before the performance confirms that the instruments are in working order and provides a warm up with a rehearsal (once before leaving home and another upon arrival at the venue). That also attends to the spiritual needs of informing their instructor and the ancestral masters, along with the land’s spirits, ensuring a successful performance and later, to provide thanks by virtue of the farewell overture.

**Silat’s Movement Sequences**

*Silat* can be performed alone, in pairs, or by a group. In the solo *silat*, the performer typically displays his graceful stances combined with powerful movements to highlight both his strength and concentration. The dual *silat* can be divided into two types, with one as a contest, and the other for entertainment, which is normally part of a ceremony. The group *silat* aims to display elegance and variety of traditional stances.

**Paying Homage to the Instructor Sequences**

At the beginning, there is a solo dance ceremony to pay homage to *silat*’s great masters called ‘*selamat*’ (see Figure 3.10). One by one the contestants will dance and move in their own style, which requires considerable mental concentration and bodily focus. Simultaneously they will recite in Arabic a wish to be safe from their enemies, forgiveness to their opponents, praying for love from their neighbours, and praying for appreciation from the audience.

This section will be followed by a dance duet, or the four compass directions dance, where both contestants dance together while again paying homage to
the great *silat* masters. The dual *silat* performance begins with the two contestants emerging from opposite sides of the arena, bowing to the audiences and paying respect to each other by another ‘*selamat*,’ which is a touching of each other’s hands and raising the hands to tap on their own foreheads.

Apart from showing respect to their great masters and praying for their own safety, the dance ceremonies are a way of preparing the contestant’s bodies and minds while highlighting their skilfulness in order to intimidate and dispirit their opponents.

**Fighting Movements**

After all the ceremonies have finished, *silat* contestants will begin their fights using their hands and feet in pushing, kicking, warding-off, and wrestling with the opponent, trying to throw him down, meanwhile the band is playing its
fast, rousing tempos (see example of fighting movements in Figures 3.12–3.17 at the end of this chapter).

The rules of *silat* require that each side has to attack and defend four times. The attacker must execute various attacks to win while the defender must protect himself by warding off the attacks, shielding himself from any brandished weapon. The performer who falls the most or who cannot free himself from a hold will be the loser (Komarathat 2006:122–124).

If the scores are equal, the applause of the audience or the surrendering of a contestant results in the final decision. The tactical areas of the body forbidden in *silat* competitions include the eyes, throat, hitting with body parts other than the ridge of the fist and the kicking of the knees or lower legs.

Figure 3.11 shows the similarity of one fighting movement when comparing the *silat* to Thai kick boxing. This is an offensive action where one attempts to attack their opponent’s head after jumping onto their knee. This reflects the possible cross-cultural blending between the martial arts of Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Muslims in Thailand. Although there is no reliable information as to the origin of this movement sequence there are legends hinting that the Muslim *silat* predates Thai kick boxing. The sequence is an iconic piece of choreography throughout Thailand. The author surmises that since it typifies the domination over one’s opponent it became so popular that it was imitated in
kick boxing, in the Northern Thailand’s sword fighting, as well as the iconic Thai theatrical performance known as *khon* in the Central region.

**The Occasions for Silat Performances**

*Silat* is usually performed for entertainment and as an accompaniment to other rituals such as:

- During the Muslim *Hari Raya* which is a three-day celebration marking the end of Ramadan, (the Islamic holy month of fasting).
- The Birds’ Procession, which is an old tradition in the Pattani Province held for welcoming guests. The procession consists of four artificial imaginary birds that are believed to have come from heaven with a *silat* band and a troupe of *silat* bare hands and *silat kris* dagger performers are the leaders of the procession. A *silat* band will perform to accompany the *silat* performance after the procession reaches the destination. There is some evidence showing that this Bird’s procession was performed during the visit of King Rama V in 1863 and again for the visit of King Rama VI in 1915.\(^\text{13}\)
- *Silat* can be performed at art and cultural festivities, VIP welcoming ceremonies, circumcisions, and rites concerning the great *silat* master’s house. This category of *silat* can be performed without restriction as to the time of day or location (Ratanaphan, 2006:20).

To hire a *silat* troupe the sponsor is required to bring the troupe’s leader a bowl of betel nut bunches which is considered a gift to the great *silat* masters and their ancestors. An agreement is then made about the time, place and the troupe’s fee, which, in 2011, ranged from 3,000 to 15,000 baht.

**Knowledge Transmission**

In Thailand there are no restrictions prohibiting women from performing *silat*. However, men are usually the only ones seen performing it, either as contestants or as artistic performers.

Training in *silat* may be long or short depending upon one’s ability, potential, and perseverance. However, as those who are interested in *silat* training

\(^{13}\) Available at <http://www.prpayneethai.com/>, accessed on 2 July 2011.
must possess a combination of qualifications such as perseverance, training consistency, tolerance of difficulties, temper control, generosity, and fairness as well as obedience to the rules and regulations, most begin later, around the ages of 12 - 20. They also need to complete the ritual of paying homage to silat’s great masters and to have been accepted into the training.

Many silat artists start teaching their children and relatives when they are as young as four to six years old so that they can participate in special occasions such as in welcoming special guests to the village, or to perform on stage when the troupe is invited to perform in large exhibitions in places such as Bangkok for the Tourism Authority.

Silat training begins with learning the movement used in the dance to pay homage to silat’s great masters, followed by the movement for fighting and/or those for artistic performances. The silat movement sequences vary between the schools, but are based on core movements such as:

- the sankha (a defense posture), langhadan (a prepared to fight, standing posture), langhathigha (defensive hand positions with the right hand covering the lower abdomen and the left arm stretch out at shoulder level), (Ruengnarong, 1999:8035).
- the student will then be trained in the more basic movements: Broeloebat (movements used when the opponent is far from oneself), kinlir (defensive movements when facing the opponent), thoepoh boelakong (kicks), the defensive movements against the opponent’s kicks and the swift retaliatory or return kicking movements, satueng-ngah- tiang (the attacks from the back). Each stance includes an adaptable movement to evade the attack and to fight back in specific situation.

The silat training sessions usually begin with salutations to the trainer followed by the practice of various movements and to each of the four cardinal points of the compass such as the “taek roi see” (‘see’ means four) movement, or a movement paying homage to the great masters as used in solo performances. This could be also used for dual dances to observe the opponent’s tactics and weak points.

There are also fighting movements: Hanuman walk, Praram shoots arrow, horse jumping and bird flapping. Some silat artists have related stories about their silat training as reflected in the following paragraphs.
Mr. Salaeh started to study silat when he was thirteen and he studied with many teachers over the years. His teachers were Mr. Wae-Deng Sidae, Mr. Awae Mudeng, Mr. Portae Portare, Mr. Yai Yang (Thai-Buddhist), and from the Kelantan state of Malaysia, Mr. Waeyusoh Tanyong-Lulo and Mr. Porsudaoh Kuelaemus. Mr. Salaeh spoke about his initial training in the Bang Pu Village of the Pattani Province:

When I learned silat I did not have to pay any tuition fee, but I gave the teacher a set of offerings known as perkuera. It was comprised of betel nut and cash in the amount of 12 baht. Then after a homage ritual to silat instructors, I practiced the twelve basics fighting movements. 1) facing the opponent and bowing to the audience pose, 2) Tae ngorkayor (To evaluate the opponent), 3) U-ku (To threaten the opponent), 4) Garuda, 5) Taporpa (also known as prom si nah), 6) Parabuju (To drive the opponent to make a fight), 7) Buelor khalormae (To use the hands to fight), 8) Tikaekanae (To attack the opponent on the right), 9) Tikaekiri (To attack the opponent on the left), 10) Tutoh (To smash the elbow into the opponent), 11) standing together to finish the silat movements, and 12) paying respect to audience and teacher (interview, 22 July 2011).

Mr. Nilaw's formal silat instructor was Mr. Tuan Luebeh who resided in the Kapongtusong village, Mueng Yala District, of the Yala Province. Nilaw took up learning the silat when he was 15 with three others from his village that have since passed away. Their names were Mr. Sayid Rawding, Mr. Dawloh Paw-eh, and Mr. Hama whose surname is not known. More recently, Nilaw has taught the silat to his son, Mr. Nimasakri Nilaw and his nephew Mr. Niyi Paehaw-Eelay. Nilaw describes his silat class:

There are two levels in learning silat. The first is learning how to pay homage to the great silat masters one by one. Then the second is the actual fighting sequences. The fighting elements include punches, kicks, throws and tactics. The kicks are limited to below the waist. In the first lesson, my teacher illustrated the movements that comprises the ritual of paying homage to the great silat masters towards the four cardinal compass directions of north, east, south, and west. We typically practised in pairs. My month-long class was taught in the evenings from 8 to 11 pm and was open to students of any religion that were fit and healthy. A student's

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14 Mr. Niseng Salaeh was born in 1961. He lives in Bang Pu Sub-District, Yaring District, Pattani Province.
success is based on their gracefulness and correctness of their movements in line with the silat traditions.

Mr. Tuan Luebeh learned silat from Mr. Haji Awae who was from the town of Buesu in the Malaysian state of Terengganu. Mr. Tuan Luebeh’s father was taught silat when he was in Malacca, Malaysia.

Laegnaenae lives in the Loo-boh-baya village of the Yi-ngaw district in the Narathiwat province. He is a farmer who has never had any formal schooling. His love of the silat began at the age of ten when he had an opportunity to be trained in the art with the silat master Mr. Hami Kapongpeesae from the same district. Mr. Laegnaenae does not know where his master was trained. He described his silat training:

In my silat training, my teacher fenced in a four-metre square area as a distinct training boundary congruent with the traditions of the ancient beliefs. The training began with the teacher demonstrating the basic sequence of movements for paying respect to the great silat masters. I began by standing straight and then raising my hands up, taking one step forward, slapping the thighs, then raising the arms with closed fists as if preparing to punch, then ending with a dance-like manoeuvre with turns and retreating backwards. These homage sequences are called gayong mat. The basic movement sets continue with the rhythmically slapping of the thighs, bringing the feet to close the step, sitting down, and then concluding by holding the hands out in the same manner as in an Islamic benediction. I followed the master’s demonstrations and practised the sequences until they were perfect.

He states that it normally takes about 40 days to become proficient in the basic homage movements to the great silat masters. Students undergoing training in the art of silat must be strong, healthy, and be able to persevere through the repetitive practice needed for perfecting silat movements.

In the past silat was passed on within the familial lines, for example, from a grandfather to a grandson or from a father to a child. Lately, as fewer of the younger generation have shown an interest in the art, the Government sector and especially the schools and cultural centres have come to support silat training by providing opportunities to those interested in the art to learn it directly from local experts.

Today’s youth tend to show more interest in the artistic performances rather than to the music that is an integral part of silat. To counter-balance this problem, during every performance silat troupes introduce and highlight the
musicians and their instruments by demonstrating the playing techniques. Some also add new instruments to the ensemble. Care is also taken so that all are visible to the audience to encourage the participation of more new musicians, especially the oboists.

The benefits of silat training are reflected in four dimensions, the body, brain, soul, and society. Bodily, it helps people through exercise and practised movements that train the nerves and muscles resulting in the nimbleness of the limbs and overall vitality. For the brain, it supports actions, quick decisions, the immediate solving of problems, concentration, tolerance, self-confidence, and temper control. For the soul, it teaches forgiveness and brings an acceptance of the ability of oneself and one’s opponent, which results in a flexibility of thinking that leads to better planning in problem solving. For society, the silat brings forth a group gathering, the learning of how to live in a group and how to respect group ethics, rules, and regulations.

Cross-border transmission and blending continues as a number of Southern Thai silat performers have reported that they often travel to perform in the Malaysian states of Kelantan and Terengganu. They also arrange an annual get-together, which includes many silat troupes from both Thailand and Malaysia along with invitations to participate in Thai government sponsored exhibitions such as the Thailand Tourism Authority’s travel festival (a tourist attraction event) and the food fair of the four regions. Those invitations encourage silat troupes to keep their traditions alive and motivate their continued transference to the younger generation.

Silat Troupes in Southern Thailand

There are many silat troupes in the Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla, and Yala provinces as advised by my key informants, Mr. Nilaw and Mr. Salaeh, during my fieldwork, as shown in Table 3.1.

Social Status of Silat Artists

In terms of the status of silat artist in the local society, silat performers are well respected by others in Thai-Muslim society. A claim can be made that the ceremonial rite of the silat shaman provides one of the reasons silat artists are worthy of respect.

As silat masters are typically invited to preside over many local rites that are closely paired with peoples’ lifestyle. The rituals are designed to ensure
wish-fulfilment and protection from illness thus their influence and level of respect extends way beyond that of a mere martial art.

Silat functions as a medium for the community to connect with their ancestors. Silat holds a special place as a respectful art in service to the community as the silat shaman retains his dignity and respect in the Thai-Muslim society of Southern Thailand.

**Conclusion**

In summary, silat traditions in Thai-Muslim community of Thailand’s four southern-most provinces of Narathiwa, Pattani, Songkhla and Yala have been carried down by rote; one on one, from master to student and from generation to generation. Many silat artists follow in the path made by their parents as they saw, heard and experienced first-hand all of its facets as young children mingling during troupe rehearsals and performances. Then later if they

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**Table 3.1  List of Silat troupes in Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla, and Yala provinces**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Name of troupe</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narathiwat 1.)</td>
<td>Mayeng Saniya (Loogkaadam), Nakohutae</td>
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<td>Yala 1.)</td>
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remained interested, opportunities were readily available for spontaneous practice with elders in the family leading to enhanced professionalism.

The close integration of *silat* with the family usually carried over into troupe members having the ability to play many roles. Numerous professional performers could also play the troupe's musical instruments as well and it was common to rotate between being a martial artist and a musician.

In terms of the rites and beliefs related to *silat* instruction, most of the artists placed a primary importance on paying homage to their instructor and to *silat*'s past masters. Paying homage to one's instructor occurs at three general times. The first is before commencing a programme of study with their selected instructor, while the second is before each performance expressing a sense of gratitude and requesting their support to ensure a successful performance. The pre-performance rite itself actually involves three stages i.e. before departure, before performing, and showing appreciation after the performance ends. Then, thirdly, there is an annual homage rite for both their current instructors as well as all for the ancestral masters – those that preceded him.

The homage rite to one's instructor is indicative of the faith artists hold and their sense of gratitude as well as respect that motivates them to act professionally with high morals. The act of offering food and other items illustrates a belief in a supernatural world where people believe there is a teacher's soul and that it needs 2–3 requisite items: betel nuts, food and some troupes may include an alcoholic drink. The performers believed their offerings will satisfy and please those in the other world, who in-turn served as their guardian spirit to protect and assist in the fulfilment of their wishes.

The rite of paying homage to *silat* shamans revealed a multi-generational faith in the supernatural that predates other formalized religions of the world. The author holds that whenever humans are afraid of something they cannot readily explain, an explanatory spirit may be created, followed by attempts made to appease it with symbolic offerings. Although most people in Southern Thailand live in proper homes which are much safer than in the past, they maintain their traditional beliefs in a spirit world that continues to address a central human need of reassurance and protection. The people in the Thai-Muslim community believe *silat* shamans can contact the spirits of the deceased *silat* masters to request protection from sickness and other evil entities. With this power of communication *silat* shamans are viewed with respect in the community. Animism existed in Thai and Malay culture before a later layer of Buddhism and Islam was added and the *wai kru* and shamanic related rites reflect this earlier belief system. Moreover, It was quite common in Southern Thailand for Thai – Buddhists to hire a Thai-Muslim troupe to per-
form a *silat* for either healing or wish fulfilment support. This reflects the fusion of the two religions.

In terms of music, *silat* music was brought into *silat* performance as an element to liven and refresh its atmosphere. More specifically, the music served to energize the artist and heighten the engagement of the audience. From the field research most *silat* artists reported knowing how to play either of the two *silat* drums, as the key rhythm of *silat* music was repetitive and only the tempo varies to mirror the actions of the performer(s). For the musicians, after they have repeatedly performed the same rhythm on numerous occasions they were able to develop and introduce more variety into the central rhythm.

The *Sunai* was not a popular instrument for those new to the *silat* troupe as it was quite difficult to learn. It required a proficiency in the circular breathing technique. Consequently, the number of *sunai* musicians was steadily decreasing with the passing of each senior player. Unfortunately, many of today’s *silat* troupes use a recording instead of a live and responsive musician, which further supports its accelerated demise.

Although *silat* has been officially recognized as a martial art in global competition, its form is quite different from the ancient *silat*. The ancient *silat* retains its original movements involved with the rites related to supernatural powers being passed on by one's instructor whereas the competitive *silat* known as *pencak silat* is concerned only with the competitive aspect of the sport.

In the author’s opinion the adaptation of *silat* performances into a contemporary dance exercise will serve only to accelerate the disappearance of the true martial art. The author believes the youth will pay more attention to the contemporary *silat* and its music, as youth tend to desire items to distinguish themselves from their parents as they mature.

*Silat* is a martial art infused with culture that brings to life its glorious history rooted in the Thai-Muslim traditions in Southern Thailand. Whilst there is no precise evidence concerning its origin, the author found it intriguing that an Arabic mantra is used in *silat* ceremonies (and not a Malay one), whilst the beliefs in both the supernatural and a *guru* being the second most respected person after one’s parents are contrary to Islamic precepts.

Regardless of the shrouded history of the *silat* art form, it remains an outstanding identifier of the Thai-Muslim community even though it ancient shamanic form is decreasing in popularity and is in danger of extinction. Both the government and private sectors are needed to promote traditional martial arts and their preservation so that the ancient *Salamat* form of *silat* is preserved. Some suggest they could organize events such as seminars, lectures, and demonstrations to keep the ancient *silat* alive in both the mind and body.
of Thailand’s young people. However, a question of concern remains for the owners of this traditional art form. How can *silat* persist as a precious tradition of Southern Thailand’s Thai-Muslim community?

From the author’s point of view, it can be said that, to keep *silat* culture alive it needs the cooperation from many parties such as the government, the private sector as well as strong community support in order to instil the *silat* culture into the soul of the young generation.

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FIGURE 3.12 Leg capture 1–2

FIGURE 3.13 Wrestling and pushing
**Figure 3.14** Jumping and knocking head

**Figure 3.15** Front kick 1–2
Figure 3.16 Backward kick 1–2

Figure 3.17 Silat kris 1–2
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