

# In this modern age, people must use silat in a practical manner



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**T**HE success of the movie *Mat Kilau* has spurred the attendance of new students at silat *gelang-gang* across Malaysia.

I've heard from fellow practitioners who taught silat that their rosters have doubled since the movie came out. This is a good sign of the sustainability of silat as an intangible heritage.

One of the common misunderstandings about silat is that it breeds gangsters and juveniles.

To be fair, there are black swans in almost any group or organisation. What is unfair is to generalise silat in that manner.

As a martial art, silat was born from conflicts. Thus, it teaches aggressive movements which originated from the battlefields of Southeast Asia.

However, visit any training session of a silat school and you will



*A silat performance at the Malacca Sultanate Palace Museum in Melaka in 2018.* FILE PIC

find the silat teacher always reminding their students to remain calm and not to use what they have learned if they do not have to.

Dan Inosanto, the No. 1 disciple of the late Bruce Lee and who learned multiple silat styles, always reminded his fellow martial artistes to run away from a fight if they can.

I have not used silat in a fight but the knowledge and skills that silat embedded me have helped in more than one situation.

When I was doing my master's degree in Adelaide, my knowl-

edge and skills of silat gave me the confidence to handle two situations.

The first incident was at a convenience store in Adelaide's central business district. It was dark and I had just arrived from Malaysia. Since I had left for a few weeks, I had to buy some household things for the rental house.

Unfortunately, only one counter was open at the store. Due to the amount of things I bought and the fact that the cash register had some glitches, an Aussie man and his two female companions behind me in the

queue were getting impatient.

The man made racial remarks and uttered some profanities. I remained calm, but was ready for any eventuality.

I just looked at the cashier and gave him an eye signal to speed up the process. The remarks continued until I exited the store.

The second incident happened when I was returning home from a silat class. It was almost midnight. The bars were open and I had to pass one to get home.

I was still in my silat attire. A man who was standing at the entrance of the bar started hurling racial insults at me. I stopped walking and braced myself for a physical assault. Luckily, that person's friend came out and took him inside before apologising to me.

I also encountered one incident during my PhD journey involving the *Marvel* character, Thor. I went to a cinema in Brisbane to watch *Thor: The Dark World*.

I was getting late, so I quickly bought popcorns and drinks, and headed to the hall.

I saw a couple occupying my seat. I politely told them that I had purchased the seat earlier. They begrudgingly stood up and walked past me.

The woman uttered some bad

words. Her partner stopped in front of me and gave me a mock uppercut, just inches from my chin. I was transfixed, but remained calm and composed.

I thanked God that a real punch did not land on my chin. If it did, I would have retaliated by smashing his face with the popcorns and drinks, and kicking him down the steps.

Do we have to use silat in this modern age? Judging from the reports of robberies, assaults, rapes and killings, a practitioner of silat or any martial arts may have to use the skills and knowledge in a practical manner.

Silat and other martial arts teach practitioners to face a situation with a calm mind, body and soul to apprehend opponents without the need to cause injury or death. This is important as our country has laws and a martial artiste, although acting in self-defence, would not want to make a criminal into a victim.

As my experiences show, silat can be used in other contexts for survival.

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