

Origins and Influences of Martial Arts of the Philippines

Filipino martial arts have been directly influenced by cultures from all over Asia and later by the Spanish assailant. History made Filipino martial arts a very rich and unique art that spread all over the world up until today.

Nov. 23, 2009 - [PRLog](#) -- The fighting arts of the Philippines were influenced by many different cultures and migrants. There are at least 3 very clear martial influences to the Filipino fighting arts: Indonesian Pencak Silat, Malaysian Silat Melayu, and Chinese (Hakka) Kuntao.

Chinese martial arts were introduced during a trade era with the Tang Dynasty of China (AD 618-907), and also by the migration the Hakka soldiers who bring with them their fighting art of Kuntao. Today, almost every Southern Asian country can find Kuntao influence in its local martial arts. It is believed that Kali is the oldest Filipino martial art. The word Kali is an old expression of the Visayas and Mindanao for blade-oriented Martial Arts, which is almost not in use any more in the Philippines. In Mindanao they say the name Kali comes from the Malay sword Keris, which became Kalis, then Kali in the Philippines. Many linguists think that Kali may be a mix of the words kamut (hand) and lihok (movement), which was contracted into to KALI: movements of the hands.

The influences...

In the 5th and 6th centuries in Indonesia, an empire was formed due to the migration of the Buddhist tribes of India to Sumatra and Java. The Malay Srivijaya Empire, as it came to be known, eventually spread as far as the Philippines. Their martial arts skills, advanced weaponry and superior organization made it possible for them to conquer the earlier settlers. Some fled to distant islands, others stayed and the two cultures merged, creating varieties of Malayo-Polynesian cultures and languages, ancestors of the Tahitians and Hawaiians.

The Srivijayas brought the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism philosophies, arts, and combative forms to the Philippines. They introduced laws (the famous Code of Kalantaw), a calendar, written alphabet (Sanskrit, on which the future Alibata alphabet will later be developed), new religion, and a system of weights and measures. This new culture developed a social unit called the barangay.

The next major incursion of foreign ideas and culture occurred in the late 13th century. The Majapahit Empire of Java, which eclipsed the Srivijaya Empire, spread throughout Southeast Asia and into the Philippines. At its height, the Majapahit Empire included areas that are today Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Brunei and the Philippines. Deeply influenced by a Hindu-Buddhist culture, the Majapahits brought their styles of Pencak Silat to the Philippines where they settled most heavily in the South (Mindanao and Sulu). This was when the Bugis warriors of Sulawesi have introduced the Keris sword (Kris) to the Philippines. It is thought by many Filipinos that the islands of Mindanao and Sulu were the birthplaces of Kali (the "mother art" of Filipino Martial Arts) during the Majapahit Empire.

In 1543 the Spaniards started colonizing the Maharlikas islands (ancient name of the Philippines), and named those the Philippines after Philippe the 2nd, king of Spain. When they arrived to the Philippines in the 16th century, the Spanish found a mixture of local, Chinese, Malaysian and Indonesian fighting methods. The first known Filipino hero, Lapu Lapu, was believed to be one of the foremost masters of Kali, a terrible fighting art inherited from the ancient Silat of the Madjapahit Empire. Lapu Lapu's Kali subsystem was known as Kali Pangamut. Lapu Lapu and his Kalista warriors are famous for having given a hard time to the Spanish conquistadors.

Lapu Lapu had vigorously trained and prepared his men for "Showdown" fights against his enemies long before his historic battle with Ferdinand Magellan on April 27, 1521, in Mactan Island. When the first Spaniards tried to subdue the recalcitrant Lapu Lapu, they were met not with fire harms, but with wooden sticks, spears, Kampilan swords and bolos. It was ironic that when the smoke of that epic battle cleared, the Spanish conquistadors "modern" weapons were no match for the traditional weapons of Lapulapu and his warriors. In this battle, Magellan was slain by Lapu Lapu with a Kampilan sword by a blow to the leg and then a thrust to the neck.

When Miguel Lopez de Legaspi landed in the Philippines and established the first settlement in 1565, he and his men noted that the local warriors were a class by themselves in the art of stick fighting and swordsmanship. He had his first glimpse of the natives' exceptional skill and ability during his landing in Leyte in 1564 when he was entertained with a Kali demonstration by the warriors of Raja Malitik. Similar demonstrations were made upon visits in Limasawa, Camiguin, Cebu and other places.

When bladed weapons were declared illegal by the Spaniards, Filipinos focused on wooden hardwood sticks. These sticks were said to be so hard that they could break a sword blade with one blow. Before long Filipino fighters had become so accomplished with their sticks, they centered entire fighting systems around stick fighting alone. Through time the Filipinos began to realize that because the stick had different handling qualities, certain lines of attack were open to them that were not available with the sword curved and snapping strikes. Once they began to appreciate the combat effectiveness of the stick the use of the knife also changed and began to be used more aggressively in terms of blocking, parrying, checking, scooping, thrusting and slashing.

Following the Spanish invasion, the name Eskrima replaced the word Kali in several islands. The term Eskrima is derived from the Spanish term Esgrima (fencing). Spanish fencing had a strong influence on the fighting arts of the Philippines, with the introduction of angles of attack, and the use of Espada y daga (sword and dagger).

After WWII and the "stay" of the Japanese, Jujitsu techniques were included to certain Eskrima styles, especially in the northern islands. The term Arnis became more popular at this time.

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