



SILAT Seni Gayong has been an integral part of my life for the last 3 years. I have learned much under the guidance and patience of Cikgu Sheikh (Sam) Shamsuddin. One of the principles that Cikgu Sam often stresses to students is learning how to be flexible -t- to be able to adapt and adjust to the situation you find yourself in.

As martial art practitioners, I am sure we have heard this lesson from our teachers in one form or another. Having spent time in the military, this same lesson was repeated and practiced regularly. Some of these military concepts can be applied when training in silat and other self-defense martial arts. One of these is the concept of dissimilar combat training. Before I go any further, I would just like to note that the intention is to not replace the traditional art you practice but to start a discussion within your group and perhaps develop training that fits your style and art.

The idea of dissimilar combat training is to create a mismatch

between you and an opponent and learn how to respond to it. In simpler terms, do not expect to be in a fair fight when facing a real-world situation. One has to make adjustments and take into account the attacker, the attacker's intent and skill, surroundings, weapons, and so on. Now, it is easy to say and dismiss this as all common sense thinking. However, under actual stress, we often defeat our common sense with emotions and



clouded thoughts. A good dose of training will help translate that common sense thinking into real and physical action.

As Cikgu Sam often says, we come in all different shapes and sizes. A good starting drill, for example, is to rotate partners

among your group when practicing techniques. Seek mismatches in height, weight or strength. Learn which techniques are effective, or rather more effective, when used against a variety of opponents. Learn which are not. Modify parts of a technique to fit your skills and body type. Expand this idea and also practice mismatches between skill levels. There is even a benefit to matching up against new students because they are not yet used to your art's movements. Done with vigor, wild punches or rushing tackles may surprise you. In a real-world situation, an attacker will most likely not know or care about the martial art that you do. Consider these mismatches with lower-skilled partners as learning to defend against unconventional attacks.

"If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle"
- Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Switch roles between attacker and victim. If you play the attacker role and your partner has progressed well, try a different attack profile. Try to think unconventionally and practice the attacker role as a teaching tool instead of as a competitor bent on total defeat of your victim. As you practice, try to focus not only on your actions. Yes, it is important to know what your strengths and weaknesses are and to know how to deal with them. Yet

we often overlook our opponents and not learn who they are and what they can do. Observe and analyze your opponent's strengths and weaknesses. Learn to think like them. After practice, exchange questions and ideas on why or how a particular attack

was done and figure out how to improve defenses against it.

If there are members of your group that have had different martial arts background, they are good sources of dissimilar training. I have studied other styles such as kenpo, kung fu and kali/eskrima and appreciate their different approaches. For example, if one in your group has a wrestling or ju-jitsu background, have him or her wrestle you to the ground. The ground is a wrestler's environmental advantage. Does your art have defenses or counters for such a situation? Think about how to turn the tables and create a mismatched advantage of your own. Having a bladed weapon

and, more importantly, knowing how to use it can turn over the advantage from the wrestler to your side. Taking the strength/weakness idea into account, you can target a wrestler's main weapons such as hands, wrists and other joints. Extend mismatches further to include weapons, too. It may be common in your art to drill against similar weapons — knife vs. knife, staff vs. staff, etc. Why not try pitting one weapon versus another? Even go as far as turning daily use items such as a belt, umbrella or a purse into a defensive weapon. The point is to be able to change a scenario as such to lessen an attacker's advantage. Developing a solid combination of core skills should help you in many self-defense situations. I have found silat

gayong as having the wide range and combination of skills to learn from.

Lastly, I would like to discuss surprise attacks. I consider a surprise attack as a mismatch in alertness and awareness. Imagine the vulnerability of a person walking ahead of you as he or she listens to an iPod or is preoccupied talking on a mobile phone. In a surprise attack, an attacker has all the advantage from the very start — dealing a stunning shock, confusion and probably landing the first strike, choke or cut. In my opinion, any training to deal with a surprise attack should focus most on recovering from that shock. In military lingo, this is referred to as regrouping from an ambush. Recovery is more of a mental exercise in that



Roehl with parang.



you have to recognize very, very quickly that you are in a bad situation. Though difficult, train your mind to switch fast into recovery mode, as time is precious at this point. Barring severe injury, the first defensive option should be escape and shielding yourself. Then, only after regrouping from that initial surprise can you even start thinking of a counter.

Dissimilar combat training — practice safe and practice well.