

Indonesian Treasure

Poekoelan tjimindie tulen's cun tao training provides students with some of the world's finest self-defense techniques

BY CHRIS RECKLIES



As today's martial artists continue a relentless search for more effective, practical combatives, the arts of Indonesia are receiving close scrutiny. With centuries of Dutch rule and invasion by the Japanese, the thousands of Southeast Asian islands became a fertile breeding ground for no-nonsense fighting methods that helped its population resist outside oppression. It's no wonder that more and more martial artists look to the islands' arts for proven fighting skills.

History

Rare and relatively unknown in the United States, Indonesian poekoelan

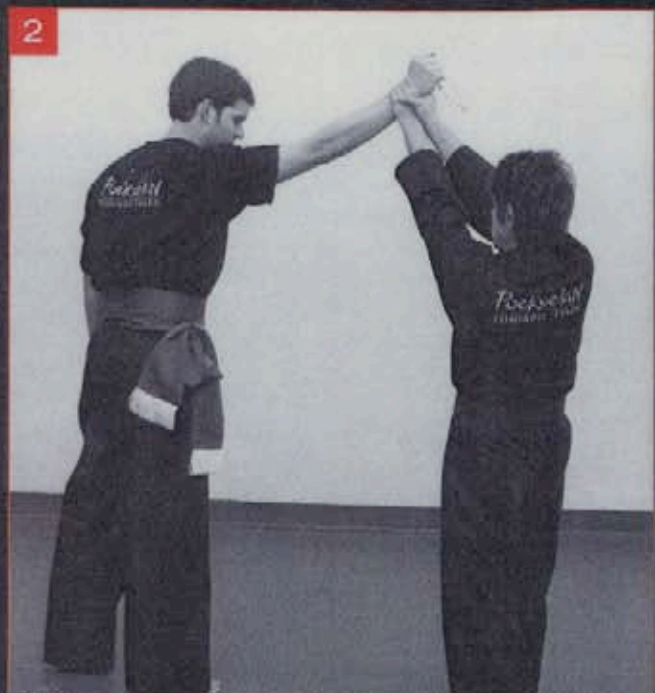
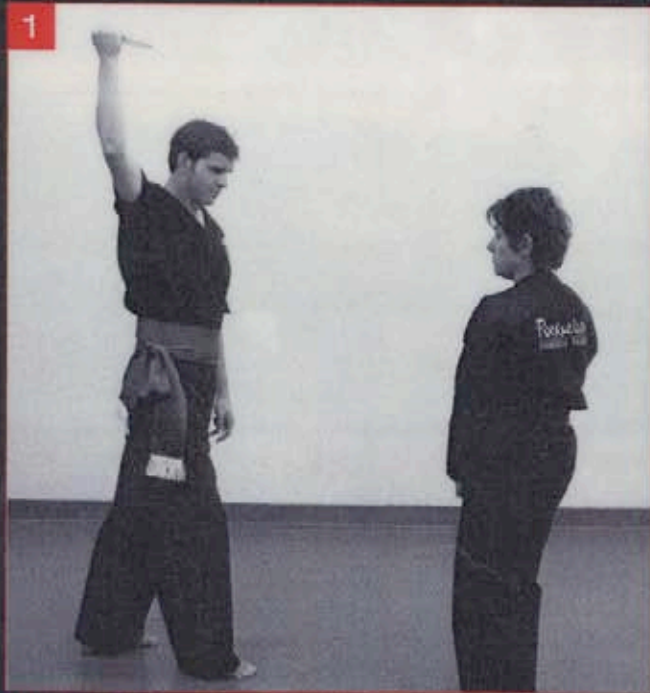
tjimindie tulen is famous for the self-defense skills its exponents possess. They are known for reacting with lightning speed and stopping armed and unarmed assailants with fast, decisive, rapid-strike counters.

A mix of Chinese and Indonesian martial arts, the method was brought to the United States in 1956. Its introduction is credited to mas goeroe agoeng Willy Wetzel, a Dutch Indonesian who reportedly was a guerilla fighter against invading Japanese soldiers during World War II. Popular legend characterizes poekoelan as the product of a martial collaboration between Chinese martial expert Oei King Boen and Indonesian master Mas

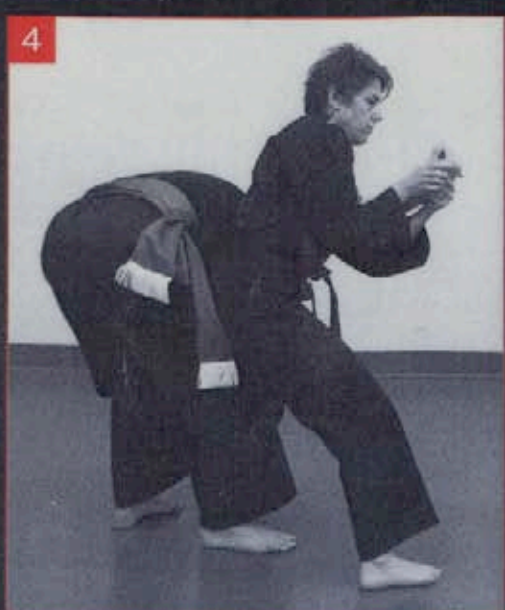
Djut-Bang Salimoen. Others believe that Wetzel traveled the islands and thoroughly learned a number of fighting methods before creating poekoelan tjimindie tulen. Regardless of the true origin, there is little debate over the method's effectiveness in the hands of a skilled practitioner.

A Complete Art

The core defensive skills at the heart of poekoelan are also the starting points for trainees in the art. This is the cun tao phase. According to mas goeroe Barbara Niggel, a long-time student of Wetzel and direct heir of his art, cun tao is actually a complete art that provides a



Knife Overhead. Faced with an overhead knife attack, pendekar Louise Rafkin intercepts the attacking arm with a chung block while moving out of the line of assault (1-2). Pendekar Rafkin kicks to the knee and steps around, trapping and pulling up to break the arm (3-4).



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strong foundation for advanced training in poekoelan.

Niggel explains that cun tao is taught in two phases, each lasting approximately nine weeks. Students are initially taught to roll and fall, a vital skill to protect oneself from injury in training and combat. Rolls and falls are drilled regularly so that the actions become reflexive. Instruction is also given in basic kicks, parries and punches, fundamentals upon which advanced skills are later built. Students are also introduced to meditation.

Range of Counters

Along with these vital basics, students are instructed in the 108 cun tao holds. These holds are prearranged responses to a wide variety of potential attacks that individuals are likely to face in no-holds-barred combat. Like various styles of karate and tae kwon do, cun tao contains responses to wrist grabs, hair grabs and chokes from the front. Unlike these styles,

all counters are learned and a relatively high level of proficiency is required before advancing to other aspects of training. The repertoire becomes much deeper as students learn defense for chokes from behind, club attacks, full-nelsons and chokes on the floor in both face-up and face-down positions. Escapes for chokes from a seated position are also covered.

Other cun tao counters address headlocks from the front and side, hand crushes and arm twists. Rushing or lunging attacks are also considered, as are three-on-one attacks where an assailant holds each arm while a third strikes from the front.

Weapons Counters

Cun tao uniquely addresses a wide range of possible armed assaults. In the case of an overhead or a low knife stab, for example, students are taught two counters for scenario. The correct response is based on the attacker's reaction to the initial defense. If the attacker continues forward, students go

with the motion and use it to their advantage. If at the initial defense, the attacker withdraws the weapon, students are taught a different approach that allows them to use the assailant's retreat to end the encounter.

Also considered are more difficult knife situations. Slashing attacks at the high, mid and low range are covered. There are several responses to the extremely dangerous scenario of an attacker holding a knife at the throat from the rear, as well as a knife at the low back or side from behind.

Cun tao also covers a wide range of possible gun attacks. These responses are formulated for basic and close range and cover difficult-to-defend-against situations. Hand-gun counters exist for guns at the side in right- and left-handed grips; guns from the front held either high or low; guns held from a distance; and guns concealed in a pocket at a distance or close range. Cun tao also offers four possible solutions to rifle or shotgun hold-up scenarios.

The Ultimate Test

Armed with the 108 holds, students in theory have an answer to most dangerous attacks they are likely to encounter. And according to Niggel, cun tao always emphasizes quickness over brute strength, which



Club Overhead.

Pendekar Rafkin counters a club attack with a funnel parry (1-2). Wrapping her arm to trap the attacker's arm (3), she strikes to the throat (4). She then sweeps the opponent's leg for a takedown (5) and drops a knee to the chest (6).



Waist strangle.

Grabbed around the waist from behind, pendekar Rafkin executes two elbow strikes to the head (1-2) before grabbing the assailant's ankle and sitting on the thigh for a take-down (3). She finishes by pulling up on the trapped leg for a break, then striking to the groin (4-5).



ensures access to effective self-defense for students of all sizes and strengths. To make certain that students can translate theory into practical application without relying on size or muscular force, they must train for and pass a speed test of the 108 holds. Only after passing the test can students move from cun tao to advanced poekoelan training.

The speed test may be one of the primary reasons for the great self-defense skills poekoelan practitioners possess. The test is the successful execution of all 108 holds with minimal errors in less than six minutes. The student being tested is attacked by multiple assailants executing the assaults covered by the cun tao holds. Attacks are full-speed, and another begins the instant one is successfully extinguished. This rapid-fire process allows no time for thought or hesitation.

"The speed test puts us in as real a situation as possible in order to test our reactions," Niggel explains. "The goal is to be sure that our responses would be a call to action and not cause a freeze response. Multiple attackers coming from all directions in no particular order not only test our action responses, but also our focus, breath control and eye speed."

Niggel adds that the cun tao training, with its realistic approach to self-defense,

provides a foundation for the fighting that students encounter in advanced poekoelan training, which includes langkas (forms), stances and the system's four animal forms.

Beyond the Physical

Cun tao benefits don't end with access to effective self-defense counters. Most students will probably never face a dangerous attack or find themselves in a situation where employing the physical tactics of cun tao is necessary. In all martial arts, what may be most important is what you can apply to your everyday life. According to Niggel, students can expect to develop a keen inner strength. They can also develop the connection between mind, body and spirit while experiencing a sense of personal empowerment. The principles of persistence and resilience may also be philosophically accessible through cun tao training.

"Above all," Niggel relates, "cun tao teaches fluid movements and the principles of bamboo: In a strong wind bamboo—a symbol of our art—will sway and snap back fiercely." ☯

Chris Recklies has more than 30 years of training and research in Asian combatives, including poekoelan tjimindie, hsiang-i, paqua and tai chi.

Where to Train

Though still relatively unknown, poekoelan tjimindie tulen is beginning to take hold in the West. Here is a list of resources for readers wanting to learn more about this remarkable Indonesian art or find instruction in their area.

The Tulen Foundation

P. O. Box 890
North Eastham, MA 02651
www.tulenfoundation.org

Studio Naga

Indonesian Martial Arts
5850 San Pablo Ave.
Oakland, CA 94608
(510) 652-NAGA (6242)
www.studionaga.com
studionaga@yahoo.com

Heart of the Dragon

8302 Southern Blvd.
Boardman, OH 44512
(330) 757-0115

Tulen Center New York City

248 W. 14th St., No. 2
New York, NY 10011
(212) 645-6661

One With Heart - Tulen Center

4231 SE. Hawthorne Blvd.
Portland, OR 97215
(503) 231-1999
(503) 234-3188 (Fax)
www.onewithheart.com

Golden Dragon Martial Arts

4730 State Highway Six
Eastham, MA 02642
(508) 255-6370
www.willysgym.com