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Introduction

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Warfare played no less a role in precolonial Southeast Asian society and history than in other regions. As Barbara Watson Andaya (University of Hawaii) observes: “[i]t would be extremely difficult to construct the premodern history of the region ... without reference to warfare.”¹ Community relationships were built around it, manpower was organized by states to maintain it, and chances were good that if one were not a war captive, you were either a near or distant descendant of one. While political decentralization may have been offset by stronger and better integrated states over the course of the early modern period, this tended to enlarge the scale of military campaigns, and the numbers of people mobilized for them.

The organizer of the workshop from which the articles presented have been drawn (and the editor for this special issue) began his own initial forays into the field of indigenous Southeast Asian warfare, and the impact of firearms in mainland Southeast Asia in particular, in the mid-1990s.² In the years that followed, the field has grown immensely, at first only a handful of scholars paid attention to this important subject, so much so that even scholars of early modern European warfare have begun to pay attention to the region.³ An opportunity to explore further indigenous warfare in Southeast Asia was presented by a panel, entitled “Aspects of Warfare in Premodern Southeast Asia,” organized by Professor Barbara Andaya at the suggestion of Dr. Gerrit Knaap (KITLV) for the Asian Studies Association Annual Meeting (April 2002).⁴ The different aspects of indigenous warfare examined by the contributors to this panel raised numerous questions about the nature of early modern warfare that begged deeper investigations. The “International Workshop on Precolonial Warfare in Monsoon Asia,” was thus organized, funding being generously provided by the Research Committee of the School of Oriental and African Studies

¹ Barbara Watson Andaya, 2003, “Aspects of Warfare in Premodern Southeast Asia,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46.2: 139.

² Two former advisers, Victor Lieberman (University of Michigan) and William H. Frederick (Ohio University), encouraged my early research on early modern warfare in mainland Southeast Asia. The early results of this research were published as Michael W. Charney, 1997, “Shallow-draft Boats, Guns, and the Aye-ra-wa-ti: Continuity and Change in Ship Structure and River Warfare in Precolonial Myanma,” *Oriens Extremus* 40.1: 16-63. Bill Frederick ran seminars devoted specifically to the topic of indigenous technologies (including warfare) which were very useful for organizing initial forays into the field. Vic Lieberman, an early modernist, has looked extensively at warfare in early modern Burma (and, more recently, mainland Southeast Asia) either as part of broader examinations or as a center of focus. One early article that considers this topic is Victor B. Lieberman, 1980, “Europeans, Trade, and the Unification of Burma, c. 1540-1620,” *Oriens Extremus* 27.2: 203-26. His most recent views are included in idem, 2003b, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830*, volume I, *Integration on the Mainland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

³ See, for example, the treatment of Alaunghpaya and Burmese warfare in Jeremy Black, 1999, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Cassel): 35-37.

⁴ The panel consisted of Gerrit Knaap, Michael W. Charney, and Felice Noelle Rodriguez. Vic Lieberman served as the discussant.

and the British Academy. From 10-11 January 2003, eleven scholars from Asia, Europe, and the United States met on the SOAS main campus to pursue such an examination.⁵ We offer four of the articles here.

Research on indigenous warfare in Southeast Asia is challenged by academic boundaries resulting from uneven attention to the topic in the coverage of different Southeast Asian societies. Examination of shipping technologies and warfare, for example, has been far greater for the Archipelago than for the mainland, although the latter has not been unrepresented. The impact of firearms on Vietnamese warfare has similarly received greater attention than for, say, Burma or Thailand. While the importance of the *kris* in Indonesian society has been the topic of numerous publications, no single item of weaponry has received nearly the same degree of attention for other societies. Consideration of the social importance of headhunting has been almost peculiar to the archipelago. Some societies, such as Cambodia and Laos, or the numerous ethnic minorities in countries such as Burma, have until recently received scant attention. The problem is made especially difficult as the only major region-wide study, H. G. Quaritch-Wales, *Ancient South-East Asian Warfare*, was published over a half century ago and, while pathbreaking in its day, represents only an initial and now outdated look at an critical area of precolonial Southeast Asian life.⁶ Although a modest eleven-page occasional paper published twenty years ago by Anthony Reid (Reid 1982), and several sections in later publications, sought to update our perspectives, they do not reflect the current surge of research that has been underway since the mid-1990s.⁷

New scholarly attention to indigenous warfare in Southeast Asia brings with it new approaches and new topics. Recent research has, for example, paid important attention to the role of gender, changing textual treatment, and even the place of animals of war. New geographical areas of interaction have been opened up, such as the impact of Chinese firearms on Vietnamese and northern mainland states.⁸ As a result, the field has become richer, both in terms of the quality of analyses and the quantity of data available, but opening new frontiers for research means that what we assumed generally for the region or peculiarly for a particular society must constantly be re-examined.

In, "History, Headhunting and Gender in Monsoon Asia: Comparative and Longitudinal Views," Barbara Watson Andaya looks at headhunting and examines the possibilities and challenges of making comparative generalizations across Monsoon Asia, but particularly for Southeast Asia and New Guinea, the possible methods for doing so, and what a gendered perspective can offer. The latter goal is especially important, for although Southeast Asian warfare is usually presented from the male perspective, Professor Andaya notes that headhunting is closely tied to fertility in the literature. Headhunting, for example, provided an opportunity for males to prove their

⁵ In addition to the authors in the present special issue, workshop participants included Professor William Clarence-Smith (SOAS), Professor Sunait Chutintaranond (Chulalongkorn University), Dr. Laichen Sun (California State University-Fullerton), Professor Ulrich Kratz (SOAS), Mr. William Womack (PhD Candidate, SOAS), and Mr. Tobias Rettig (PhD Candidate, SOAS).

⁶ H. G. Quaritch-Wales, 1952, *Ancient South-East Asian Warfare* (London: Benard Quaritch).

⁷ Anthony Reid, 1982, *Europe and Southeast Asia: the Military Balance*, Southeast Asian Studies Occasional Paper no. 16, (Townsville, Australia: James Cook University of North Queensland), idem, 1989, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*, volume I, *The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press), and idem, 1993, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*, volume II, *Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

⁸ Sun Laichen, 2000, "Ming-Southeast Asian Overland Interactions," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan.

manhood, and thus their qualification for marriage, and females were prominent in post-headhunting rituals. Although nineteenth and twentieth century ethnographic data provides the key source of information on headhunting, Professor Andaya mobilizes archaeological evidence and early European accounts to demonstrate the pre-nineteenth century historicity of related practices.

Two aspects of premodern Southeast Asian Warfare that must be kept in mind. First, it has been argued with some evidence that certain societies averred to significant bloodshed in warfare, justified by the population-poor environment. However, the overwhelming share of indigenous and European sources points to an extreme shedding of blood probably no less severe than that experienced in Europe of that time. Second, early modern warfare in Southeast Asia existed in a world context, not only due to the involvement of foreign mercenaries and adventurers, but also because almost from the beginning of the early modern period firearms had begun to have an impact. The Burmese probably used firearms from the beginning of the fifteenth century, such as at Bassein in 1404.⁹ Indeed, indigenous chronicles written at a later point indicate a late early modern perspective that firearms had always been part of Southeast Asian warfare.¹⁰ From the early fifteenth century onward, firearms affected nearly every area of warfare in the region, from stockades to raiding, river warfare to sea combat, and fortress sieges to field battles. For the most part, firearms were successfully integrated into prevailing forms of warfare, albeit modified to one degree or another,¹¹ but new concerns such as gunpowder production, gun funding or procurement, and training in handling firearms were added to the vast array of other concerns. However much they accelerated centralization in the political sphere, especially for those states with a monopoly on maritime trade, firearms per se do not seem to have altered to a major degree the sociology of warfare across the region.

Europeans were both impressed and, at times, fearful of Southeast Asian warfare, both because it was deadly, even when they could resist it, and because it was something they found difficulty in adapting to it. Between the lines of accounts of accounts of Portuguese bravado and victory of European firearms of the early seventeenth century sieges of Syriam (in Lower Burma), for example, we find evidence of a reliance on thousands of indigenous warriors. The Dutch in Java would have found success evasive without the support of Bugis soldiers under Arung Palakka. Fundamental to the general failure of Europeans to adapt to Southeast Asian warfare were cultural differences in how warfare was perceived. As Leonard Andaya demonstrates in his article, "Nature of War and Peace among the Bugis-Makassar People," the Dutch saw warfare in terms of its material costs, while Bugis-Makassar people saw it in terms of the social relationships, that is, honor and relationships. While fighting in South Sulawesi in the seventeenth century remained focused on traditional weapons, such as blow-guns and poisoned arrows, guns being represented in small numbers, indigenous warriors could also wage war with the aid of the spiritual realm through rituals involving the community. In these rituals, links to powerful ancestors were made with drums and banners. On the earthly plain, women

⁹ Charney, 1997, "Shallow-draft Boats, Guns, and the Aye-ra-wa-ti," 55.

¹⁰ See the coverage of fourteenth century warfare (and firearms) in Ayudhya in Richard D. Cushman (trans.), 2000, *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, David K. Watt, ed., Bangkok: The Siam Society: 13.

¹¹ As Leonard Andaya explains, "The new firearms technology did not transform tactics in Southeast Asian warfare. Instead, in many cases the new weapons simply reinforced traditional weapons in established war strategies." Leonard Andaya, 1994, "Interactions with the Outside World and Adaptation in Southeast Asia, 1500-1800," in Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press): 1.387.

and children occupied fortifications in the fighting to provide support for and urge on the men. In "war and Culture: Balinese and Sasak Views on Warfare in Traditional Historiography," Hans Hägerdal similarly explores the cultural values involved in indigenous Southeast Asian warfare as represented in the *babad* genre of historical literature. Dr. Hägerdal focuses on textual treatment of warfare among the Balinese and Sasak in precolonial Bali and Lombok. Rather than challenging elite honor, the introduction of firearms, for example, is mythologized in the texts, in the same manner as other, more traditional weapons. Moral right was determined by one's access, again, to supernatural forces. Interestingly, given the strong association between ethnicity and warfare found in Konbaung-era Burmese texts is not found in the *babad* literature examined by Dr. Hägerdal.

Beyond ship-decks and fortress walls, Europeans found fighting Southeast Asians difficult, explaining in part their failure to take the mainland, and portions of the Archipelago, until the nineteenth century. Moves by western and central mainland courts to adopt more Western modes of warfare, including European-style regimental organization, drilling, and tactics from the early nineteenth century, however, may not have reduced the effectiveness of indigenous armies against domestic enemies, but they could not realistically compete with European technological advances and industrial growth over the course of the century. The transformation of indigenous warfare by indigenous Southeast Asian states encouraged reconsiderations of the potential effectiveness of Southeast Asian resistance to European arms, although it was recognized as useful for political centralization against indigenous competitors. As Crawford observed in the 1820s:

"While barbarous nations depend upon civilized ones for the munitions of war, and abandon the modes and habits of warfare natural to their condition, the former are only the more at mercy of the latter; and it is a matter of notoriety, that no Indian [including Southeast Asia] nations have been so speedily subdued as those who have attempted to imitate European tactics. The effect of fire-arms in civilizing the barbarous tribes themselves, should not be overlooked. The possession of them gives the more intelligent and commercial tribes an advantage over their ruder neighbours, and thus a power is established, which cannot fail more or less to the diminution of anarchy, and the melioration of law and government."¹²

European accounts of indigenous warfare from about this time become generally less complimentary and more given to ridicule.¹³

As John Whitmore explains in his article, "The Two Great Campaigns of the Hong-Duc Era (1470-1497) in Dai Viet," however, Dai Viet (Vietnam) formally organized its military in the fifteenth century on the Ming Chinese model. By examining two different kinds of campaigns, one directed against the Chams in the south and a later one directed against Tai peoples to the northwest, Dr. Whitmore demonstrates how new military organization brought with it fundamental changes in the ways in which Vietnamese not only undertook military campaigns, but also how

¹² John Crawford, 1828, *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China,; Exhibiting a View of the Actual State of those Kingdoms* (London: Henry Colburn): 547.

¹³ Colonial-era scholarship tended to be more generous regarding the strides made by nineteenth-century military reform in the region. See, for example, R. R. Langham-Carter, 1937, "The Burmese Army," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 27.3: 254-276.

they understood the goals and purposes of warfare. Initially, warfare was intended for plunder, in terms of both human and material booty, but later campaigns, by the mid-fifteenth century, involved the exploration of new lands and their acquisition. Alongside a bureaucratization bringing with it a delineation between civil and military powers and functionaries, warfare now had a moral purpose: to bring civilization to the uncivilized. By contrast with the Dai Viet of Dr. Whitmore's study, however, the Theravada Buddhist countries of the central and western mainland moved more slowly in the direction of a formal military, still only a pale reflection of the Vietnamese case by the mid-nineteenth century. But Vietnam's moral justification of expansionism is paralleled to a significant extent, and much earlier, by the role of Buddhist kings in protecting Buddhism wherever it was claimed to be in disorder. The utilization of firearms, effective in large part because of Vietnamese use of terrain to maximize their advantages and their military organization, Dr. Whitmore demonstrates, proved irresistible to the Cham and Tai reliance on the "traditional ... pattern" of Southeast Asian warfare. Two otherwise very different operational contexts, the Cham lowlands and the Tai highlands, thus permitted remarkably similar results.

Two future publications will help put these studies into a broader context, both in terms of coverage of the region as a whole and in terms of periodization. First, these articles and other papers from the workshop are being prepared for an edited volume on precolonial warfare in Southeast Asia. Second, the editor of this issue is preparing a general study of indigenous warfare in the region from the end of the charter period, circa 1300 to the end of the nineteenth century.

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