Exploration of Conlan’s *State of War*

The book *State of War* by Thomas Conlan focuses on the reconstruction of the model of 14th century wars. The analysis of the book centers on how major war concepts such as motivations, the role of religion and politics, the weaponry and wounding of victims help in the creation of great insights regarding these wars (Conlan 12). While there are many stories and myths surrounding the nature of the samurai warriors, the book has put into perspective this aspect, demystifying the notions and separating the myths from the truth through the use of primary documentations, thus creating a better understanding of the warriors, as well as the state of the 14th century warfare (17).

While the myths have shaped the nature of the ancient warriors as fearless, inhumane and tolerant to the extremes, also being men of high courage, brevity and war-capability, the truth, as established by the book, is that the samurais and other ancient warriors were just professional soldiers and policemen with good training, who were fundamentally moved by the promises given to them, and who were also ambitious, coveted power and wealth, and were afraid of dying as is any other human being (22). The only distinguishing characteristic between the samurai warriors and the rest of the traditional fighting forces from other parts of the world is their patience. They did not hurry for the war, and they took ample time to analyze and evaluate the situation, before making any move, to ensure that their chances of failure in warfare were minimized (Bolitho 470). It is this exclusive characteristic that has been coined into myths and a notion indicating their superhuman fighting capability, yet the book has established that they
remain human and exuded human characteristics, with no special capacities, other than for their waiting and fighting from far technique.

Through the book’s documentation of Nomoto Tomoyuki’s escapades in the battle front, it has been established that there existed not much difference between the samurai warriors and any other fighting battalion, regarding the execution of their plans and the fear of dying on the battle front (Conlan 56). While patience formed the major fighting concept for the samurai warriors, the most vital aspect of war in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century was evidence, since it determined the rewards that the warriors were to obtain. The bureaucracy in the warriors system required that the warriors should present the evidence of the people they had killed in the battle, through presenting their heads to the king, so that the soldiers could then be rewarded (Bolitho 472).

*State of War* identified that it is the need for recognition, the ambition and coveting for rewards that motivated the soldiers to assume the war risks, while calculating their moves through applying the concept of patience, to ensure that they did not end up losing their lives, at the expense of the recognition and rewards. The bureaucracy also required the recording of the warriors among the fighting camp, so that they could qualify for recognition and rewards. Therefore, the basis of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century warfare is that the warriors could be bought by promises, and the ambition to become wealthy and recognized formed the major motivation for their engagement in warfare (Friday 33).

The motive of the warriors in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century battle is an aspect that is well demonstrated in the book. While different fighting battalions could have various motivations, the samurai warriors’ fighting was motivated by, among other things, being witnessed (Conlan 122). The bases of surviving as a samurai warrior were majorly two. The physical appearance of the warrior in the war meant that the warrior actually remains eligible to the recognition and the
rewards obtainable from participating in a war (77). Therefore, there were all manners of techniques and methodologies applied by the samurai warriors to ensure that their participation in any war was fully recorded, since participation alone was not sufficient, but the actual witness that the warriors was a part of the fighting camp was the most essential aspect. This forced some warriors to adopt techniques, like painting their horses in bright or white color, just to ensure that their presence in the war would be recognized (Gay 562).

Additionally, the other vital aspect that qualified a samurai warrior, as established by the book, was the perpetration of meritorious deed during the war. This meant that it is through the achievement that the warriors would register on the battle ground, which would in turn count towards their recognition and acknowledgement (Conlan 112). The aspect that complicated this requirement is the fact that witnesses of the commendable act that warriors had displayed in the battle front needed to be present so that the warrior could be recognized and rewarded (Friday, 85). Therefore, the fighting tactics of these warriors were complicated by the fact that they had to be witnessed, so that their presence in the battle front would count. This informs the motivation for the brevity and the boldness displayed by the warriors, who were not acting on the basis of simply fighting, but to create witnessing of their presence and achievements in war.

The choice of weaponry forms the other major discussion of this book, with clear analysis of the weapon acquisition and use in the war period, where there lacks major changes from the 1300s to the 1400s regarding the use of weapons (Bolitho 471). Arrows form the basic weapons that were used by the warriors during the war periods in the 14th century, and the large numbers of casualties that are recorded were observed to be wounded through the arrows (Conlan 183). The major focus on the weapons and their application in the 14th century battles is simply meant to create an understanding of the transitions that have occurred over the history,
while also emphasizing how the traditional weapons, accompanied with various fighting tactics formed the basis of the war victories that the warriors registered during the warfare (Turnbull 51). This discussion is meant to dispel any notion of weaponry differences between the weapons used by the samurai warriors and other fighting battalions of the 14th century, so that the focus of the 14th century warfare can be shifted from the weapons and their application. This way the major focus can be placed on the social and financial ramifications, ideologies, tactics and religious influences, which formed the major difference between the samurai warfare and other fighting battalions during this period.

The major focus of the book is the reconstruction of the history of the warfare in the 14th century, through the application of various techniques to form a concrete knowledgebase on the motivations of the war, and how the war was fought (Conlan 91). Through the application of techniques such as wound analysis, which focuses on the nature of the wounds that were left on the bodies of the victims during the war, a constructive description of the weaponry used can be made (Turnbull 47). Through such analysis, a model of war is formed, which presents the 14th century war as majorly skirmishes, where the majority of injuries that victims sustained were as a result of shooting through weapons such as arrows (Bolitho 473).

The role of religions such as Shinto and Buddhism, as well as the role of superstition in the 14th century warfare, and the relationship of such religious concept with political expediency and administrative aspects of the fighting forces, forms a major insight into the external factors that influenced warfare in the 14th century, outside the normal motivations of war victory, reward and recognition (Gay 563). The aspect of beliefs and superstitions are well elaborated, with the beliefs of the warriors that certain prayers and intercessions formed a major part of the war victory. The relationship between religion and political power, and how the relationship
determined the start or the end of the war sheds more lights into the reasons the 14\textsuperscript{th} century war occurred (Conlan 169). In conclusion, the application of primary documentation of events, as well as the deep analysis of various aspects of the samurai warfare and other wars, while relating the same to motivations, religion and superstitions involved, helps to reconstruct the history of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century warfare.
Works Cited


