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"Vietnamese Guns and Chinese Warfare (1550-1683): A Global Approach"

Abstract:

This research deals with the spread of firearms from Vietnam to China during 1550-1680s (a period I term the “Century of Warfare 戦争の世紀” in Asia). It aims at revealing an ignored episode in Asian (and global) military history during the early modern era, so to redress the overwhelming picture of China’s influence on Vietnam. “Vietnamese guns” (called in Chinese records “Jiaoqiang 交枪” or “Jiaochong 交銃”) refer to guns manufactured in Vietnam under the guidance or influence of the Europeans (especially the Portuguese and Dutch). During the Century of Warfare in Vietnam, Vietnam was politically fragmented and incessant wars were waged among the Mac, the Le, and the Nguyen dynasties. The high frequency of warfare urged the Vietnamese to sharpen their weapons and especially to improve their firearms. As a result, Vietnamese guns had reached such a high level so that many spread to China. Warring parties (first the local and rebels troops and then Ming government troops) in China during the Ming-Qing transition embraced Vietnamese guns quickly and adopted them in their fighting. Those guns proved to be very effective generally and sometimes decisive on the battlefield. This research first outlines the frequent warfare and the employment of firearms in Vietnam during the period in question, then traces the channels of the dissemination of the Vietnamese guns to China, and finally examines the types of the Vietnamese guns. It argues technological transfer between China and Vietnam was a two-way traffic; though most of the time Chinese technology influenced Vietnam, occasionally Vietnamese technology had an impact on China. Relatively rich Vietnamese, Chinese, and European sources are utilized in this research.