Another Study of the Introduction of Guns to Japan: As a Counter-argument to the Criticism of Dr. Shōsuke Murai

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There is an established theory that guns were first introduced to Japan through Tanegashima Island in August 1543 (Tenmon 12). This theory is based on Teppo Ki (Journal of Guns) written by Nampo Bunshi in 1603 (Keichō 11), over half a century after the guns were introduced to the country. The journal manifests that the wide spread of guns at that time was solely attributed to Tokitaka, who had got guns from overseas. It also describes Tsuda Kenmotsu; Suginobō a priest from Negoro-ji Temple; Tachibanaya Matasaburō a merchant from Sakai; and Matsushita Gorōsaburō as people who spread guns from Tanegashima Island to Sakai in Izumi Province and Negoro in Kishū Province, and then from these provinces in Kinai region to Kanto region, though judged from historical evidence, the description is far-fetched. Nevertheless, not a small number of people believe that the description of Teppo Ki that guns were introduced to Japan through Tanegashima Island is the only one truth.

The arrival of guns in Tanegashima Island was accidental at all. It was because a large ship was cast up on the island. The ship was the Chinese-style ship of Wang Zhi (汪直) choku, a famous leader of wakō (Japanese pirates) who were busily engaged in smuggling on the ocean in East Asia in violation of the restrictions on maritime trade by the Ming Dynasty and who established deep relationships with daimyō and merchants in Kyushu and Saigoku regions. In recognition of this fact, the author has indicated that it was wakō who separately and gradually introduced guns from Southeast Asian countries to Tanegashima Island as well as Kyushu and Saigoku regions.

Although the introduction of guns to Japan has been studied over a century since the Meiji era, the debate was recently rekindled among researchers in the history of foreign relations in medieval Japan. Particular attention has been drawn to the theory of Dr. Shōsuke Murai, who severely criticizes the author for firmly insisting that guns were introduced by wakō and for not providing enough counter-arguments to answer three major questions: (1) the interpretation of guns in the historical documents of Korea and Ming China; (2) the origins of the guns introduced to Japan; and (3) the question whether a wide variety of guns really means that they were separately and gradually introduced to Japan. Dr. Murai also emphasizes that the introduction of guns to Japan should be seen as a direct encounter of Japanese with Europeans. As there is a difference of view, this article aims to answer the three questions raised by him from the viewpoint of the history of guns and gunnery.
Key words: Teppo Ki (Journal of Guns), introduction of guns to Japan, wakò (Japanese pirates), guns introduced by Europeans, gunnery