

# Securing the emperor, securitising the guns: the strangely delayed dissemination of Ottoman military technology in the late Ming empire

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*Abstract:* This article analyses the reasons behind the delayed appropriation and adoption of Ottoman harquebuses by the Ming army. Although these weapons had reached the empire by the mid-16th century, their existence was only acknowledged at the end of the century. Through the lens of securitisation, I will argue that this delay was a result of the context of Luso-Ottoman geopolitical rivalries in which these weapons were possibly leveraged as an incentive to form a Sino-Ottoman alliance against the Portuguese. I will argue that a civil bureaucracy averse to assertive activist rulership could have prevented the emperor from participating in the resulting military diplomacy. By comparing this event with a later Dutch East India Company embassy with similar geopolitical intentions, I will argue that the Ming civil officials achieved their goal by controlling the emperor's perception of Ottoman intentions. In terms of securitisation, this meant that the emperor himself was the main audience and his officials the securitising agents in matters of foreign relations.

*Keywords:* cross-cultural negotiation, military technology transfer, diplomacy, Ottoman empire, Portugal, Dutch East India Company, Ming and Qing China, gift giving, Imjin War (1592–8), muskets, harquebuses.

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## Introduction

During the Imjin War (1592–8), a destructive conflict that encompassed all of East Asia, Zhao Shizhen (1553–c. 1611), a civil official who knew many men serving in the Ming military, was involved in an archery contest with two brothers. He found out that their father, Babuli, had been part of a purported Ottoman embassy to the Ming court, and had brought a lion and weapons from the Ottoman empire, including a type of harquebus that had been unknown to Zhao Shizhen.<sup>1</sup> Their adoptive father Duosima, moreover, had been an officer and firearms expert in the Ottoman army and had been a member of the same embassy. After the embassy had been received, Babuli and Duosima apparently chose to stay in the Ming empire and became members of the Brocade Guard, a prestigious military unit often enlisting non-Chinese personnel, which was under the direct command of the emperor and tasked with the security of the imperial court. Babuli and Duosima entered the Ming empire by way of an embassy in 1564, almost 30 years before the Imjin War.<sup>2</sup> Zhao Shizhen became an enthusiastic advocate of the Ottoman harquebus they brought, and as we shall see later, thanks to his efforts this weapon was eventually adopted in the early 17th century.

This timing raises a number of interesting questions. First of all, why were Ottoman envoys visiting the Ming court at this juncture, and why were they bringing weapons? Second, why did it take almost half a century before these weapons reached any degree of widespread adoption within the empire? This second question is especially interesting in light of the fact that the Portuguese-derived harquebus was quickly copied from captured Sino-Japanese *Wokou* pirates in the 1540s by Ming officials and pressed into service. Moreover, there is some evidence that the Ottoman muskets might have already reached China in the wake of a late 15th-century border conflict with the city state of Turfan on the Silk Road.<sup>3</sup> The 1550s and 1560s, around the time the Ottoman embassy reached China, also witnessed the culmination of the aforementioned *Wokou* raiding activities along the south-eastern maritime zone of the empire.<sup>4</sup> So, given their superiority vis-à-vis the lighter Portuguese-derived *Wokou* muskets, why were these weapons only strongly advocated for more general use at the end of the 16th century?

One of the biggest problems in interpreting this military transfer between the Ming and Ottoman empires is the scant nature of the sources available describing the nature of the Ottoman embassies. Chinese sources are relatively terse in their description

<sup>1</sup> Needham et al. (1986: 440–55).

<sup>2</sup> Watanabe (1975: 313).

<sup>3</sup> Andrade (2016: 171–2); Sun (2018: 121–4).

<sup>4</sup> Ma Jianchun 马建春 (2007: 73); Robinson (2017: 316); Tsai (1996: 98–100).

and cast doubt on the official nature of the embassy and do not list the Ottoman harquebus as part of the gifts. Up to now, no Ottoman archival documents have been unearthed which could throw light on this episode either.<sup>5</sup> To ameliorate this shortcoming, I will juxtapose and compare the Ottoman embassy with a later and more extensively documented diplomatic effort by the Dutch East India Company in 1655 to leverage military aid to the Chinese Qing dynasty as a means of establishing a military alliance against a geopolitical competitor. By utilising this comparison, I will first cast the Ottoman embassy as an instance of military diplomacy comparable to the Dutch effort a century later. By military diplomacy I mean the leveraging of military aid in the shape of technology and personnel transfers, or loaned coercive capabilities, by one state or actor with a military for the benefit of achieving diplomatic goals with another state or actor. Furthermore, the comparison will allow me to tentatively reconstruct the internal and geopolitical dynamics at play determining the outcome and discursive representation of the Ottoman embassy in the Chinese sources.

By viewing these political dynamics through the lens of securitisation, this article will then shed new light on the conditions under which firearms could or could not circulate through the empire against a backdrop of geopolitical military diplomacy and explain the delayed adoption of the Ottoman harquebus. Securitisation, which is predicated on the power of speech-acts by securitising agents to intersubjectively create threats for a specific audience in favourable contexts, can fruitfully be applied to analyse the 1564 Ming and 1655 Qing attitudes towards foreign military aid and technology. I will advance the argument that to properly understand Ming military securitisation in a military diplomatic context, civil officials can be understood as the securitising agent, the emperor as the audience, and military diplomacy as the subject of securitisation. This methodological intervention will allow us to see the result of military diplomacy, including the delayed adoption of the Ottoman harquebus, as largely an outcome of an ongoing process of renegotiation of the emic understanding of rulership vis-à-vis the role of the civil bureaucratic governance, in which civil officials tried to dissuade the emperor from embracing a model of activist rulership running contrary to their political and economic interests.

### **Diverging interests of the court and the coastal officials and elites**

Sino-Ottoman diplomacy of the 16th century was conducted against the backdrop of the contrasting interests of the court and the regional officials governing the coastal provinces, who also often represented the interests of the local elites. The court conducted its official foreign relations through the so-called tribute system, but recent

<sup>5</sup> Ma Yi 马一 (2018: 42).

scholarship has criticised the notion of the ‘tribute system’ as a fixture of late imperial international relations by pointing out the changes it underwent in terms of frequency of utilisation, participants and semiotic content.<sup>6</sup> One scholar has gone so far as to denounce it as ‘an English term, created by Western scholars, to describe a mystical, ineffable Oriental reality which is claimed to be inaccessible to Western or Eastern minds—except the mind of the Oriental scholar himself’.<sup>7</sup> I would argue the latter classification goes a bit too far, and should probably be understood as an aversion to the frequent invocation of the concept as a bedrock of describing a supposedly Chinese way of organising a peaceful system of international relations, based on a hierarchical world order with China at the top. I posit the concept can still be used to describe a persistent tendency during much of the early-to-mid Ming (up to *c.* 1570) and early Qing dynasties (up to 1683) to control international interactions. Two persistent characteristics of this system were the framing of international relations in unequal terms and ritually expressing these relations with the exchange of gifts.<sup>8</sup>

The system could partially be interpreted as a security measure aimed at controlling the dynamic maritime economy of the south-eastern coastal provinces, although it regulated foreign (trade) relations with non-maritime entities as well. The founding emperor of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398), envisioned his empire as an autarkic polity with an agrarian base, and any potential usurpation of imperial priorities unleashed by a growth in economic and political importance of the provinces bordering the maritime frontier was strictly controlled. Furthermore, any possible collusion between the coastal elites and foreign interests had to be pre-empted, to prevent centrifugal tendencies within the empire. Therefore, no private foreign trade was allowed outside of the tribute system, which led to a conflation of foreign diplomacy and economic activities. The envoys would be rewarded with gifts of superior value by the Chinese emperor and the embassy members would be allowed to engage in normal trading activities. Embassy parties would be received at the frontiers by the regional bureaucracy, who sent the request for an audience to the court in the capital. After approval, the embassies would be escorted across the empire to the court.<sup>9</sup>

During the early Qing, any diplomatic negotiations were generally forwarded in advance by letter, or through consultation with regional officials. Once the embassy was approved and underway, not much scope for negotiation remained. Concerns about espionage activities kept the embassy personnel confined under guard in their lodgings. As the early Qing tribute system was based on a simplified version of its Ming precedents and largely shaped by the same political considerations, the same

<sup>6</sup> Biedermann et al. (2018: 21).

<sup>7</sup> Perdue (2015: 1002–14).

<sup>8</sup> Park (2017: 53–5); Swope (2002: 757–8); Wills (1984: 3).

<sup>9</sup> Higgins (1980: 31); Wilson (2009: 45); Zurndorfer (2016: 63–6).

probably held true in the 16th century. Any direct contact with the emperor during the audience was completely up to his whims, including his propensity for viewing the foreign gifts meant for him.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in theory, the emperor was an autocrat with unlimited power and had the last word, which meant that direct access to him could change the reception of the diplomatic matters brought forward by an embassy-in-progress, as we shall see later.<sup>11</sup>

However, there was also an alternative informal channel for diplomacy open via cross-frontier contacts during the Ming and Qing periods based on reaching understandings with the regional provincial officials. Despite the Ming dynasty founder's preoccupation with curbing the dynamism of the maritime frontier provinces, in the course of the dynasty the political centre tended to focus on threats along the northern steppe frontier, leaving southern officials a certain leeway in policy making. At different points during the 16th century the provincial leadership of Guangdong was able to convince the court in Beijing that allowing trade outside of the tribute system would make it easier to control the population. By 1557 the Portuguese, after bribing the governor of Guangdong, were able to exploit this situation to secure a lease for a settlement, Macao, facilitating stable trading arrangements. For a while, probably as a result of deliberate misinformation, the Ming court was apparently even under the impression that Macao was inhabited by Southeast Asians, not Europeans. Perhaps the Portuguese had even employed their brand of military diplomacy to achieve this fortuitous result, as they claimed they had helped the Ming suppress Sino-Japanese *Wokou* pirates in exchange for the settlement.<sup>12</sup>

There was thus a divergence between the interests of the political centre and the maritime provinces. Most of the empire's civil officialdom was recruited from among the elites of the southern half of the empire, which included the south-eastern coastal provinces. This was the wealthiest and most populated half of the realm and formed its cultural and economic heart. The civil officials who originated there were drawn from the same elites who often had economic interests in the illegal foreign trade. It was therefore in their interest to prevent strong state interventions in the maritime affairs. A famous example was Lin Xiyuan (1482–1567), a former civil official who, while back in his native coastal Fujian, advocated for an alliance with the Portuguese against the disruptive *Wokou* without destroying the international maritime commerce his home province profited from.<sup>13</sup>

Ming officials did express an awareness of this collusion and the Janus-faced characteristics of the southern civil elites. One of them was Zhu Wan (1494–1550), who

<sup>10</sup> Park (2017: 53–5); Wills (1984: 5, 13–16, 23–35).

<sup>11</sup> Pines (2012: 44–45, 53).

<sup>12</sup> Lim (2013: 16); Wills (2011: 35–40).

<sup>13</sup> Fu (2017: 163–70).

was tasked with suppressing the disturbances caused by the *Wokou*, including their Portuguese collaborators, in the mid-16th century. He made some military headway against the pirate gangs, but he was unable to undertake any punitive measures against the powerful local families who provided them with tacit political backing, profiting as they did from *Wokou* trading and raiding activities. Eventually these families and their influential connections in the officialdom—rumours implicated Lin Xiyuan in this plot—led to the political fall of Zhu Wan and his suicide. This incident makes clear that the civil bureaucracy was not a monolithic bloc, and that with the right political savviness and connections, it was possible to conduct shadow-diplomacy with regional officials who had vested interests in the maritime trade. This could lead to successful outcomes, if these regional officials were able to make their case to the court in Beijing and were well-disposed towards the foreign trade interests of the local population and their elites. However, it is impossible to find any official communication stating this frankly as evidence; regional officials had to clothe their arguments against state intervention in neo-Confucian garb, which generally disapproved of heavy-handed state-led activism on ideological grounds.<sup>14</sup> These internal political fragmentations facilitating additional channels for negotiation played an important role during the conduct of military diplomacy by foreign political entities vis-à-vis China, as we shall see below.

### **The tribute system as a channel for military diplomacy?**

Despite the various hurdles that the system put into place preventing the reaching of easy diplomatic understandings, it was not impossible to achieve success through participating in it. Consider, for example, the 1655–7 Dutch East India Company embassy to the court of the Qing emperor. Early Qing tribute missions like this have the advantage of being described in detail by a multiplicity of involved European actors, including Dutch, Portuguese and Jesuits.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it had all the trappings of a military diplomatic mission and its eventual fate bore witness to a panoply of domestic and foreign political forces at work. The events surrounding the Dutch diplomatic mission were a product of a geopolitical power struggle reaching the shores of China, as well as internal power struggles, a pattern I will argue was also in evidence during the earlier Ottoman embassy.<sup>16</sup>

To a large extent, these diplomatic efforts closely paralleled Dutch practices elsewhere in Asia. Where the Dutch had no qualms about using coercion to meet their trade objectives vis-à-vis weak Asian polities, against larger and more powerful political

<sup>14</sup> Bol (2008: 141–4); Fu (2017: 160–3); Higgins (1980); Wilson (2009: 240–1).

<sup>15</sup> Wills (1984: 36–7).

<sup>16</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 535–78).

entities and empires a resort was more often made to diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> However, even here, military power could be a useful leverage. The Dutch attempted an exchange: military support against domestic and foreign opponents in exchange for trade opportunities. The company in a way served as a protection seller, whereby Asian potentates were drawn into a dependent relationship in which they depended on the company for military support in return for trade monopolies. This was already in evidence during the first Dutch expeditions to Java in 1596, when they communicated the fact that they were merchants and significant politico-military actors as well. The performance was rewarded, in that the ruler of Banten asked the Dutch to take part in a military expedition against one of his rivals.<sup>18</sup>

The Dutch East India Company was a strange early modern hybrid of a commercial trading company and a state. The company had received the rights from the Republic to wage war and make treaties with Asian rulers, and thus it availed of its own armed forces and coercive capabilities. The two identities of merchant and ruler normally did not clash, but when it came to military diplomacy it could sometimes lead to tensions. Military diplomatic leveraging could broadly take two forms: the offering of military assistance with assets that remained in the company's hand, or the bartering of weapons as gifts or products, especially advanced European guns and cannons that were much appreciated in Asia. For instance, the East India Company leveraged military aid against the domestic opponents of the ruler of Japan in the first half of the 17th century, and cannons were also often utilised as diplomatic gifts. The king of Siam desired of the Dutch to upgrade his naval power during the 17th century as well. In both instances the company's internal tension between its merchant and ruler identities manifested itself as reservations about outright technological transfer of weaponry. Instead, temporarily dispatching military units in order to maintain long-term coercive superiority vis-à-vis Asian polities was preferred. However, the king of Siam then chose to rely on Chinese and Portuguese expertise instead, testifying to the fact that there were serious incentives to share military technology for the company, even if it potentially compromised one's own position. Not doing so could surrender geopolitical influence to competitors.<sup>19</sup>

During the first Dutch embassy to the Qing court, in 1655, these patterns of military diplomacy were in evidence as well. In 1653 the Manchu had just conquered Guangzhou, and some officials were extending feelers to the Dutch to see if they would be willing to send a tribute embassy in order to gain access to Chinese markets.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Knaap & Teitler (2002: 2–3).

<sup>18</sup> Goor (2004: 49–50).

<sup>19</sup> Boxer (1950: 26–37); Clulow (2018: 206–7); Clulow & Mostert (2020: 28–30, 34); Kraan (1998: 42, 74); Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 546).

<sup>20</sup> Blussé & Falkenburg (1987: 14).



This would have a twofold advantage: local officials could profit from the resulting trade, and it would undermine a shared enemy, a maritime entrepreneur-cum-warlord called Zheng Chenggong (1624–62). Called Koxinga in Dutch sources, Zheng Chenggong was in control of some coastal areas in south-eastern China in what is now Fujian province. He was both a commercial competitor to the Dutch and a military threat to the Qing.<sup>21</sup> The company sent an embassy of about 20 persons, led by Pieter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyser which consisted amongst others of two interpreters, but also six soldiers, a drummer and a trumpeter. In various sources it is hinted that the Qing court was indeed interested in Dutch military aid, and that the Dutch were able to generate the interest of various officials. The governor of the province of Fujian for example, showed interest in the weapons the Dutch soldiers carried, and in the trumpeter. On the way back from Beijing, some of the Chinese officials present there were also very much impressed by the Dutch warships moored in the harbour of Guangzhou.<sup>22</sup> All in all, the East India Company seems to have been able to communicate its status as a politico-military power. The interest this aroused was certainly not restricted to the local officials, but according to Jesuit sources, the emperor himself was interested in trumpeters and, perhaps more importantly, would liked to have had Dutch officers and engineers to train his military forces.<sup>23</sup>

However, the envoys were deliberately shielded from knowing what was going on behind the scenes and also prevented from establishing any direct contact with the emperor during the audience, making any on-site negotiations an impossibility.<sup>24</sup> According to the Dutch report, the embassy had tried to communicate to the emperor, through his officials, that they were willing to supply naval aid against Zheng Chenggong's forces, but this offer was apparently ignored.<sup>25</sup> In the emperor's decree, which was promulgated in response to the Dutch written proposals, they were asked to only bring tribute every eight years, on account of the long distance they had to travel.<sup>26</sup>

At first sight, this chain of events seems to confirm there was a tribute system for the management of foreign relations, with its emphasis on the ritual confirmation of the status of tributary vis-à-vis suzerain precluding any meaningful exchange, or transfer in the military field. But there was one further avenue through which exchange

<sup>21</sup> [Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops \(2002: 539–42\)](#); [Wills \(2011: 67–70\)](#).

<sup>22</sup> [Blussé & Falkenburg \(1987: 38, 58\)](#).

<sup>23</sup> [Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops \(2002: 568–70\)](#).

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous (late 18th century: 75–77); [Blussé \(2013: 24\)](#).

<sup>25</sup> Henriette Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops apparently did not consult this original version of Johan Nieuhof's (1618–72) report, which does narrate this Dutch offer. This proves her suspicions that the East India Company intended to offer military support against Zheng Chenggong, and that this passage was edited out in the published version of Nieuhof's account, perhaps for reasons of secrecy.

<sup>26</sup> [Blussé & Falkenburg \(1987: 49, 54–55\)](#); [Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops \(2002: 570–71\)](#).



could happen, namely the exchange of gifts. In Eurasian diplomatic practices, gifts normally functioned as tokens of friendship, courtesy and generosity. But in this case I would argue that they could also be interpreted as a sampling of available trade products, capitalising on the custom of offering gifts to the emperor originating from an embassy's place of origin.<sup>27</sup> For the emperor, these kinds of presents, like exotic animals, displayed the universal sway of his rulership.<sup>28</sup>

According to a Jesuit source, weapons were well-represented as gifts as the Dutch brought 'a suit of armour embossed with gold. Twenty three guns of several sorts and sizes, all richly and curiously wrought. Six broad swords. Six other swords hatched with gold ... Two guns. Two lances. One sword with a silver hilt and rich scabbard'.<sup>29</sup> At this time the Dutch Republic was one of the biggest European weapon producers, and it is by no means farfetched that the company was trying to attract the Qing emperor's interest in Dutch weaponry through these trade samples.<sup>30</sup> There were also precedents for using the tribute system as a channel for the transfer of military aid, since both the Koreans and Mongols had sent the Ming dynasty horses for military use under the guise of tribute gifts.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, this tactic was probably on the verge of gaining the emperor's favour, as can be surmised by the distraught reaction of the Jesuit Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), when he reviewed the presents the Dutch brought.<sup>32</sup> The Jesuits enjoyed a privileged position at the court in Beijing, and they had acquired this status in part due to their knowledge of weapon manufacture.<sup>33</sup> In this context, we should not view it as surprising that Adam Schall von Bell felt threatened by the Dutch diplomatic overtures. If the Qing managed to secure, amongst other things, an alternative supply of European weapons from the Dutch East India Company, it would undermine the Jesuit monopoly in this field and threaten their indispensability, and perhaps threaten the *raison d'être* of Portuguese Macao as well.<sup>34</sup> Probably for this reason Adam Schall von Bell tried to undermine the diplomatic effort by claiming that not one in 10 of the gifts was Dutch, thereby also discrediting their ability to provide the weapons.<sup>35</sup> In the context of intra-European rivalries, the Jesuits who were entangled with the Chinese court could keep out potential competitors with

<sup>27</sup> Blussé (2013: 23).

<sup>28</sup> Robinson (2013: 278).

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous (late 18th century: 72–94).

<sup>30</sup> Vogel (1993: 13, 18).

<sup>31</sup> Fairbank (1968: 3–4); Fairbank & Têng (1941: 137–41, 153); Kang (2012: 146); Robinson (2017: 94–5).

<sup>32</sup> Blussé & Falkenburg (1987: 28–9).

<sup>33</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 558–9).

<sup>34</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 554).

<sup>35</sup> Anonymous (late 18th century: 92).

their more intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the bureaucracy and their access to the emperor.

Internal political dynamics thus partly undermined the Dutch military diplomacy, but not only the Jesuits were to blame. Jesuit sources mentioned the Dutch might have succeeded if they had they explicitly sought a military alliance against Zheng Chenggong and offered military instructors to the emperor. However, as can be read in the original report by Johan Nieuwhof that was discovered in the 1980s, the Dutch embassy did indeed raise this possibility of an alliance with Chinese officials. So what went wrong? According to Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops, this alliance proposal was deliberately not forwarded to Beijing by the regional officials who first welcomed the Dutch at Guangzhou. The reason being that they were probably profiting from the trade with Zheng Chenggong as well, and did not desire a Qing alliance with the Dutch interfering with this source of wealth. In other respects, the Dutch were quite successful in bribing Chinese officials, as concerned Jesuit and Portuguese reports indicate. By the time De Goyer and De Keyser reached Beijing, a faction had formed at court in favour of granting Dutch trading access. But even this fortuitous development was sabotaged by the Jesuits with Portuguese financial support, who started a bribing campaign of their own.<sup>36</sup>

The most decisive bribe, however, seems to have been a substantial financial gift delivered by Adam Schall von Bell to the emperor himself, which he was able to deliver thanks to his personal access to the ruler. The bribe was accompanied by warnings about the nature of the Dutch: in Europe they were known as mere pirates who had rebelled against their sovereign. Moreover, Schall von Bell warned the emperor that once the Dutch were allowed access to the empire for trading purposes, they would build a fort, install cannons, and become difficult to dislodge.<sup>37</sup> Schall von Bell was clearly trying to persuade the Chinese ruler to regard the Dutch as a threat. In terms of securitisation, the emperor was the audience, and the Jesuit, an official serving him, was the securitising agent. The ostensible subject of securitisation was the empire itself, but this was also a convenient façade hiding the more parochial interests of the Jesuits and Portuguese. The fate of the 1655 embassy highlights the crucial importance direct access to the emperor could play. He was, after all, the final arbiter and therefore direct access to him was such a valuable commodity. Internal political dynamics, consisting of competing political and economic interest groups which had the opportunity to control processes of securitisation, thus seem to have defeated the military diplomacy of the Dutch. A relatively similar geopolitical power constellation in interaction with internal political dynamics can be seen at work during the Ottoman embassy of the 16th century as well.

<sup>36</sup> [Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops \(2002: 553–8\)](#).

<sup>37</sup> [Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops \(2002: 563–4\)](#).

## **Ottoman-Portuguese rivalries in the 16th century**

The Ottoman embassy of 1564 was, like that of the Dutch a century later, part of a larger geopolitical conflict in the region. The 16th century is often seen by historians as the start of the early modern period, a period characterised by the expansion of Europe and the creation of global maritime networks of trade. Because of this focus on Europeans as the most important agents in the creation of an early modern globalised world, the role of other regions and polities in this process is often neglected. However, the 16th century was also the century in which the Ottoman empire reached its height of power and influence, and this translated into geopolitical influence in as far away as the Southeast Asian state Aceh.<sup>38</sup> Historian Giancarlo Casale has even claimed the 16th century to be an Ottoman Age of Exploration comparable to its European counterpart.<sup>39</sup> If Babuli and Duosima really were members of an Ottoman embassy to China, we can perhaps add China to that list of explorations as well. But what drove the Ottomans so far east?

According to Casale, during the 16th century a so-called Indian Ocean faction of the Ottoman elite tried to defeat the expanding Portuguese empire in Asia by establishing their own pan-Muslim empire in Asia. The Portuguese bypassed by sea the Ottoman blockade of the land trade route between Europe and Asia and threatened Muslim trade interests and pilgrimage routes further east. This resulted in Ottoman naval forces deployed all the way to India and the creation of alliances as far away as Aceh in Southeast Asia.<sup>40</sup> One charge that has been levelled against Casale is that he did not really prove that an Indian Ocean faction existed as a cohesive group of people within the Ottoman elite.<sup>41</sup> However, when we look at the 16th century it is hard to deny that people designated as Ottomans or Rumis (after Rum, or the Byzantine 'Roman' empire the Ottomans had succeeded) show up all over South, Southeast and East Asia, often as either envoys offering military alliances, merchants or military specialists aiding in the casting of cannon and the production of firearms. For example, Babur (1483–1530), the founder of the Mughal empire, deployed an Ottoman firearm specialist in his service in battle in 1526.<sup>42</sup>

Both the Ottomans and the Portuguese were important vectors for the dissemination of firearms in India, and this process seems to have been entangled with geopolitical competition. The Indian sultan of Gujarat, for example, was in an alliance with the Mamluks and the Ottomans against the Portuguese, but relied on the military

<sup>38</sup> Ma (2018: 42).

<sup>39</sup> Casale (2010).

<sup>40</sup> Casale (2010: 201–3).

<sup>41</sup> Gürkan (2014: 998–1000).

<sup>42</sup> Streusand (2011: 255).

support of the latter when facing the Mughals in turn. This was after the Ottoman head of the Gujarati artillery had switched sides and joined the Mughals in 1535.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the king of Siam employed Ottoman officers commanding his soldiers. In addition, in Malayan literature the importance of Ottoman gun founders is often stressed, for example for their help establishing the state of Patani.<sup>44</sup> In Aceh the Ottomans blatantly intervened and supplied cannons to the Acehnese to thwart the Portuguese.<sup>45</sup>

Giray Fidan has argued that the diffusion of Ottoman weapons and military experts was a deliberate imperial policy to maintain supremacy vis-à-vis the Portuguese.<sup>46</sup> However, the exact nature of the relation of all these experts with the Ottoman empire is not always clear; sometimes they seem to be acting as official representatives of the Ottoman empire, sometimes they seem to be mercenaries without claiming an official tie with the Ottoman empire, and sometimes they seem to be merchants or mercenaries pretending to be official representatives. The same held true for the Portuguese empire in Asia, which was much less cohesive than the later Dutch presence.<sup>47</sup> Ottoman and Portuguese mercenaries operated in South and Southeast Asia, and sometimes found themselves on the same side.<sup>48</sup> Relations between the Ottoman empire and Rumi mercenaries were also known to be often tense.<sup>49</sup> There does appear to be a pattern in the diffusion of Ottoman weapons as they often seem to be disseminating in areas where the Portuguese are also trying to establish political and commercial footholds. Yet whether this was the result of a conscious imperial policy, local mercenary activities or merchant initiatives is not always clear. Just like the Dutch East India Company represented a sometimes-awkward fusion of merchant and state identities, it is perhaps equally fallacious to try to see the Ottoman engagement with Asia too much as a result of separate political and commercial imperatives.

Chinese records mention around 20 tribute embassies identifying themselves as Rumi reaching the Ming empire during its existence. Between three to five arrived in the first half of the 15th century, and a further eight then appeared during the long reign of the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–67). A final three arrived in 1576, 1581 and 1618 respectively.<sup>50</sup> According to David Robinson, the reason the Ottomans might have sent official embassies to the Chinese emperor was forming an alliance against Turfan,

<sup>43</sup> Casale (2010: 55–6); Gommans (2002: 148).

<sup>44</sup> Kadi (2016: 14–17).

<sup>45</sup> Reid (2014: 82–7).

<sup>46</sup> Fidan (2011: 17–26).

<sup>47</sup> Winius (2002: 105–8).

<sup>48</sup> Kadi (2016: 16–17).

<sup>49</sup> Gürkan (2014: 999).

<sup>50</sup> Ma (2007: 72); Nakajima (2018: 141); Watanabe (1975: 312–13, 316).

the abovementioned adversarial city state.<sup>51</sup> In the late 15th century, Turfan's rulers had conquered Hami, another city state on the Silk Road, multiple times. Hami was strategically important for the Ming empire, because it acted as the gathering point where overland tribute embassies from Central Asian and Middle Eastern rulers were received and vetted, before being allowed to continue into China. Turfan's annexation of Hami had them gain control over this important aspect of the tribute system.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, during the late 1520s the Chinese still considered waging a campaign to reconquer Hami and the three Ottoman embassies that arrived in that decade might have been sent to discuss this matter.<sup>53</sup>

However, by the time Babuli and Duosima arrived in China, the Turfan issue had been shelved indefinitely and the barriers against trade had been removed for the time being.<sup>54</sup> This argues against his embassy being part of an anti-Turfan effort on the part of the Ottoman emperor to restore uninterrupted trade with the Ming empire, which brings us to other possible motives behind the next wave of five 'Rumi' embassies arriving between 1543 and 1564, when the conflict with Turfan was already decades in the past. These arrived just as the Portuguese were making significant inroads in East Asia. Around this time, Portuguese mercenaries serving a Chinese pirate were blown off course to the Japanese island of Tanegashima, and famously introduced their hosts to the Portuguese harquebus, which in Japanese service would make such an impact during their civil war and the invasions of Korea at the end of the century.<sup>55</sup> After 1543 the Portuguese became middlemen in the trade with China, after the Japanese had been banned from the tribute system because of a number of violent incidents in which the latter had been involved in Chinese port cities.<sup>56</sup> As mentioned above, by 1557 the Portuguese had successfully established themselves on the Chinese coast after bribing regional officials and perhaps leveraging their naval strength against pirates. The 1550s and 1560s had also witnessed the highpoint of Sino-Japanese *Wokou* piracy raids, in which some Portuguese also participated. In these circumstances, it would not be unreasonable to think that official Ottoman envoys tried to counter these Portuguese inroads in East Asia by leveraging military aid. After all, similar policies were pursued by the Ottomans in South and Southeast Asia. Conversely, the 'Rumi' embassies might have been opportunistic merchants and mercenaries simply trying to follow the Portuguese example. Whatever the case might have been, the end result was the same as elsewhere in Asia: Ottoman and Portuguese arms disseminated, although the former

<sup>51</sup> Robinson (2013: 333–4).

<sup>52</sup> Fairbank & Têng (1941: 163); Rossabi (1972: 215–25).

<sup>53</sup> Dardess (2020: 389–404).

<sup>54</sup> Dardess (2020: 404); Rossabi (1972: 225).

<sup>55</sup> Andrade (2016: 166–71).

<sup>56</sup> Wills (2011: 32–4).

took three decades longer to escape obscurity. What can explain this time lag in China? This turns me to the last part of my argument, which analyses the process of securitisation and its outcomes that might have undermined Ottoman military diplomacy and the dissemination of their weapons.

### **Ottoman embassies between the emperor and his officials**

When ‘Rumi’ envoys started arriving in the 1520s, Ming officials tried to persuade Jiajing to refuse them an audience. At this point in time, Portuguese diplomatic overtures had just been rebuffed and they played a marginal role in maritime trade.<sup>57</sup> Hence, the bureaucratic obstruction against accepting Ottoman embassies was probably not only inspired by tacit pro-Portuguese sympathies. The officials’ attitude can perhaps better be explained as a result of a shifting mood about the content and type of rulership the Chinese emperor should embody.

Initially, some Ming officials voiced the thought that the first ‘Rumi’ embassy was in fact originating from Turfan and sent to spy, using the cover of gift giving to bribe Ming officials.<sup>58</sup> This was not an unreasonable suspicion, seeing as bribing was a common occurrence surrounding the conduct of tribute embassies, but it apparently failed to deter Jiajing. The officials then shifted their discourse towards criticising the inappropriateness of the gifts, securitising them by presenting them to the emperor as a moral threat. The official Ming history mentions that Ottoman envoys on different occasions presented lions, rhinoceroses, horses, camels and precious stones as tribute gifts to the emperor. The dismissive reaction of the civil officials towards the tribute gifts is very telling in this regard. In addition to voicing doubts about the authenticity of the embassies, the nature of the gifts themselves were criticised in moral terms: how were precious stones useful for feeding the hungry? The keeping of lions in imperial menageries was similarly dismissed as an extravagance.<sup>59</sup> The civil officials cloaked their arguments against accepting these gifts in very edifying Confucian moral discourse: a virtuous emperor should not have a wasteful menagerie with exotic animals and accept precious stones, but attend to the needs of his subjects. This seems like a somewhat baffling reaction, considering the fact that the act of giving exotic animals and precious objects as gifts were part and parcel of diplomatic exchanges between rulers in much of Eurasia.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Wills (2011: 25–32).

<sup>58</sup> Robinson (2013: 329, 333–4).

<sup>59</sup> Robinson (2013: 329).

<sup>60</sup> Biedermann et al. (2018: 1, 18).



The background to this Confucian moral posturing, as so often in life, was a naked political power struggle about the nature of imperial rulership in Ming China. By Ming times there were two competing notions: the first being the Chinese Confucian ideal of rulership. In this model, the ruler ought to attract through this virtue other virtuous and talented men whom the ruler then recognises as such and appoints as his ministers to govern the realm on his behalf. They also help to rectify the emperor's vices. The implicit contradiction that an emperor can only attract virtuous men if he has already somehow been morally rectified, was never solved in Confucian political theory. But no matter, it was an entirely self-serving fiction that legitimated the political dominance of civil officials and those sections of the population they were mostly drawn from: wealthy landowners, and later also wealthy merchants. In this system, the emperor's authority was in theory absolute, but in practice hamstrung by bureaucratic rules, customs and precedents. The emperor most beloved by the civil officials functioned like a rubber-stamp institute, outwardly maintaining the fiction of being a paragon of Confucian moral virtue. Once in a while, however, this notion of rulership was threatened by a competing activist model that was derived from Central Asian political traditions. As China was every few centuries conquered by a fully or partially Central Asian conquest elite, the Confucian model temporarily also periodically gave way to the Central Asian model. This model emphasised personal leadership, even exercised directly on the battlefield. It required the ruler to have a menagerie, for it displayed the reach of his universal authority. It required the ruler to go on extensive hunting campaigns, for this is how he built a personal relationship with his closest military commanders and it allowed him the opportunity to conduct foreign relations with envoys accompanying him on the trip.<sup>61</sup> This kind of rulership side-lined the civil officials as mere suppliers of the resources to support the active ruler's whims and all the warfare that usually came with it—resources that would be extracted from exactly the social strata the civil officials were recruited from.

By the 1520s, the civil officials were discouraging this kind of rulership from reasserting itself. Things had been going well for them up until the beginning of the 16th century. The first few Ming emperors had been activist rulers, continuing the Mongol legacy of the preceding dynasty. However, later emperors were increasingly brought up within the confines of the Forbidden City, tutored and inculcated by civil officials, and kept away from the battlefield. Moreover, a Ming emperor who led an army in the field suffered a catastrophic defeat and was captured by Mongols in 1449, provided a frightful demonstration of the dangers of activist rulership. Slowly the status quo favouring the civil officials was returning. One emperor had temporarily broken with this development, the Zhengde emperor, who ruled from 1505 to 1521. He tried to revive the ruling style of his ancestors, and was mercilessly reviled and mocked for

<sup>61</sup> Brook (2010: 79–81, 86–105); Pines (2012: 50–3, 68–75); Robinson (2013: 10, 13–18, 358–80).

it in the records left behind by the civil officials. After he died having contracted an illness after drunkenly falling off a boat in the Yellow River, the civil officialdom must have heaved a collective sigh of relief.<sup>62</sup> His successor, the Jiajing emperor, a very wilful man himself, at least had to be kept away from embracing the same notion of rulership as his predecessor.

This internal struggle could be one reason why the Ottoman embassies in 1564 and their gifts were so poorly received. The Jiajing emperor had to be prevented from getting interested in the manifestation of activist rulership displayed by his Ottoman colleague's gifts. As we shall see, Jiajing probably never even knew about the Ottoman weapons that had been brought—gifts or not. Moreover, pro-Portuguese officials with interests in the coastal maritime trade, whom we know existed, might have worked behind the scenes against the Ottoman embassy as well.

If Babuli and Duosima indeed came as part of an official embassy to China with the aim of enticing the emperor into a kind of geopolitical anti-Portuguese alliance with exotic animals, precious stones and guns, the post-Zhengde civil officialdom would have had every incentive to prevent this from succeeding. But Jiajing disregarded the opinions of his officialdom and received the Ottoman envoys. Robinson speculates that Jiajing knew he had to pay lip service to the concerns of his officials, but that he also had to conform to the unwritten diplomatic rules his contemporary activist Eurasian peers like the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I (1494–1566) abided to. Rejecting an official embassy could have dire consequences. Thus, the exotic animals were accepted and the menagerie flourished, even under Jiajing.<sup>63</sup> But what happened to Duosima and his weapon? When we consider their fate, interesting parallels with the Dutch embassy of 1655 become more apparent.

When Zhao Shizhen, the civil official fascinated by the Ottoman muskets, interviewed Duosima during the Imjin War, the latter narrated that the officials of the Jiajing emperor did not let him leave after they had handed over a lion as a tribute gift. It is unclear whether any Ottoman weapons, or perhaps Duosima himself as a military expert, were even meant as a gift, or whether they were simply meant for protection of the envoys.<sup>64</sup> The official Ming records do not mention weapons being presented as a gift. On the other hand, Duosima's specialist military knowledge and any impressions he might have gathered about the empire's disposition perhaps made him simultaneously too valuable and too dangerous to be let go wandering off again. The way back to the Ottoman empire went through Central Asian lands containing many political power centres antithetical to Chinese interests, but capable of offering attractive career opportunities, like Turfan. Again, seen through the lens of state

<sup>62</sup> Robinson (2013: 214–41).

<sup>63</sup> Robinson (2013: 334–40).

<sup>64</sup> Sun (2018: 122).

security, the Chinese civil officialdom had every incentive to try to keep him in China and seduce him into military service. The Brocade Guard he was assigned to was a special unit which predominantly included foreigners of Central Asian origin, that were tasked with internal security. The exact reason why foreigners performed this exact function is not known, but a possible reason is their lack of vested interests and ties with other power elites in the empire. They also possibly formed a convenient pool of compartmentalised knowledge about the outside world.<sup>65</sup>

As part of the army, Duosima was probably obliged to keep the knowledge about firearms restricted to certain circles, as part of state security measures instituted by early Ming rulers.<sup>66</sup> So, in the end he ironically contributed to the lack of circulation of knowledge about his weapons. Within the context of military service, their knowledge of superior Ottoman weapons could be controlled by the state.

According to Zhao Shizhen, Duosima's knowledge of Ottoman firearms did not really diffuse in the Ming empire, and by the 1590s, Zhao is advocating these weapons as still a very new phenomenon. A reason Zhao advances for this time-lapse is the reluctance of officials to inform the emperor about this technology: 'Even when the ministers investigated and acquired knowledge about these weapons, they seemingly did not report it clearly to the throne, the model did not obtain dissemination, the skill was not ventured to be exercised, and it was indeed caused to fall into oblivion; this has proven to be deeply unfortunate'.<sup>67</sup>

From Zhao's testimony it appears as if the knowledge of the technology's existence was deliberately kept from the emperor. A passage in the imperial dynastic chronicle seems to confirm this act of *agnogenesis*, the actively constructed ignorance of the emperor by civil officials.<sup>68</sup> It describes how the civil official-staffed Ministry of War requested Babuli and Duosima be enrolled in the Brocade Guard following 15th-century precedents set for envoys from Hami. 'In the Brocade Guard they will receive salary and afterwards they will not be allowed to come again and memorialise the emperor and cause trouble.'<sup>69</sup> So close, yet so far. The Ottomans served the court in the physical vicinity of the emperor, but they were apparently barred from ever communicating with him again. This, incidentally, also testifies to an apparent rift that had grown by the late Ming between the emperor and inner court institutions like the Brocade Guard, which had originally been set up during the early Ming to centralise the emperor's personal control over gunpowder weapons.<sup>70</sup>

A final level of security concerns that might have hindered the diffusion of the Ottoman muskets was constituted by an anxiety about foreign perceptions of the

<sup>65</sup> Serruys (1961: 59–83).

<sup>66</sup> Duan (2018: 24–8).

<sup>67</sup> Zhao Shizhen 赵士楨 (2006: 378).

<sup>68</sup> Proctor (2008: 8–11).

<sup>69</sup> *Ming shilu* 明實錄 (1966); *Ming Shenzong shilu* 明神宗實錄 22:582.

<sup>70</sup> Duan (2018: 26).

empire's strength. Chinese officials were wary of accepting military aid if it simultaneously constituted a security threat itself, or if it threatened to undermine the perception of Chinese military superiority vis-à-vis foreigners. That this recognition of superiority was important for the Chinese civil officials and was entangled with security concerns, can be seen if we look at the reactions to the military assistance offered to the Ming by the Macao Portuguese in the 17th century against the rising Manchu threat. Despite the clear advantages that Portuguese military skills and advanced artillery held against the Manchu, their military assistance kept being sabotaged by civil officials for two reasons related to state security. One was that it would give the Portuguese critical insights into the military strength of the Ming empire. Second was the fear that a reliance on foreign military personnel would undermine the claim to superiority of Chinese civilisation and diminish the sense of awe the Chinese tried to stimulate in their opponents.<sup>71</sup>

In the end, it took a new war and a new Chinese emperor actively interested in military affairs to rescue the Ottoman muskets from obscurity. In 1592 Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98), who had recently politically unified the islands, invaded Korea with the intention of using it as a launching pad for his conquest of China. The campaign was initially a great success: the Japanese army advanced far northwards and eventually even captured Pyongyang. With Japanese forces edging ever closer, the Ming empire decided to intervene on behalf of the Koreans. The resulting confrontation would last until 1598 and involved hundreds of thousands of troops on all sides of the conflict, a mobilisation of manpower and resources that dwarfed anything going on in contemporaneous Europe.<sup>72</sup>

While this conflict was going on, a lively debate on how best to pursue China's war aims arose among Chinese officials, which was fortunately recorded in statecraft compilations and military treatises for later generations to peruse. Among these writings was a compilation of memorials to the emperor on military matters, which appeared sometime in the early 17th century, and was partially written during the war. The author was Zhao Shizhen, who at the time of the war had a relatively low position as a palace secretary in Beijing. It was not, in fact, his job to comment on military affairs, but he did so anyway. He felt entitled to do so because, a few decades earlier, he had witnessed the conflict between the Ming empire and the so-called 'Japanese' *Wokou* pirates along the south-eastern maritime frontier of China. Zhao himself was born in one of the coastal provinces affected by this struggle, Zhejiang.<sup>73</sup> *Wokou* as a term had a derogative connotation, referring to the Japanese as 'dwarf bandits'. However, many of the *Wokou* were not Japanese at all; it is more accurate to understand the *Wokou*

<sup>71</sup> Swope (2014: 87–88).

<sup>72</sup> Swope (2009: 5–6).

<sup>73</sup> Craig (2016: 157–64).

as groups of loosely organised multi-ethnic merchants-cum-raiders. They were people who depended on maritime trade for their livelihoods but had been disenfranchised from pursuing this lifestyle by a strictly enforced maritime trade prohibition issued by the Ming court. There were many Japanese among them, but the majority probably consisted of Chinese, with a few Ryukyuan, Southeast Asians and probably even some Portuguese mixed in.<sup>74</sup>

Because of his experience with the ‘Japanese’ *Wokou* in his youth, Zhao Shizhen arrogated to himself the authority to advise the emperor, Wanli (r. 1573–1620) on the conduct of military operations against the far larger regular Japanese armies invading Korea. The Japanese formations were especially feared for their use of harquebuses in well-drilled formations capable of continuous fire in volleys. These had made a devastating impact on Korean armies, and they proved daunting for Ming forces as well. The harquebus had only recently in the mid-16th century been introduced to East Asia, probably by the Portuguese, and the Japanese had developed effective battlefield tactics making full use of the gun’s possibilities.<sup>75</sup> To counter this threat, Zhao Shizhen proposed Ming forces should adopt the Ottoman musket, which was more powerful, accurate, and had a longer range than the Japanese harquebus.<sup>76</sup>

After the war, Zhao Shizhen’s proposals were accepted and the Ottoman muskets were finally put in production for the Ming army. The weapons were fielded against the Mongols at the northern frontier. What had changed to facilitate their introduction? First of all, by the 1590s the Ottoman embassies were becoming a distant memory and it was presumably possible to solicit Duosima’s help in adopting his weapons without it entailing a geopolitical entanglement with Ottoman interests. After 1589, the Ottoman interest in maritime Asia declined and their presence waned.<sup>77</sup> When Hideyoshi invaded Korea in 1592, there was no sign of Rumi interest in the proceedings. Neither did the Portuguese intervene, although there are a few hints in sources that Portuguese soldiers, probably mercenaries, fought on behalf of the Ming against Hideyoshi’s army. Conversely, the Japanese ruler tried to arrange with a Portuguese Jesuit for two carracks to fight in his navy, but the anti-Christianity stance he had adopted by 1587 presumably derailed this proposal.<sup>78</sup> With both the Ottomans and the Portuguese uninterested in taking sides during and after the war, the issue of accepting military aid from a sole former Ottoman envoy long since in Ming military service presumably was no longer seen as such a security risk by the officials.

<sup>74</sup> Antony (2003: 22).

<sup>75</sup> Swope (2009: 75–7).

<sup>76</sup> That Ottoman muskets were more powerful and had a longer range than their European counterparts was also admitted by contemporary European observers. Ágoston (2014: 106).

<sup>77</sup> Casale (2010: 182).

<sup>78</sup> Correia (2018: 107–11); Neves (1994: 20–4).

A second facilitating factor was the emperor himself. The reigning Wanli emperor (r. 1573–1620) was conducive to accepting Zhao Shizhen's proposals for adopting the Ottoman muskets after the Imjin War. The emperor was often at loggerheads with his civil officials, but he was keenly interested in the conduct of military operations and cultivated close ties with military personnel.<sup>79</sup> A factor in this success was thus possibly Wanli's great personal interest in military affairs.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, we lack the same kind of detailed behind-the-scenes documentation for the Ottoman embassies which clarified the fate of the Dutch embassy of 1655 and its military diplomacy. In the case of the Ottoman embassies and the fate of Duosima's possible attempt at leveraging military aid, we can only speculate about the background forces at work behind its obscuration at the emperor's expense. Perhaps a faction of pro-Portuguese officials was indeed actively preventing the Ming emperor from becoming cognisant of the possible military dimensions of the Ottoman diplomatic overtures, like regional coastal officials had kept the similar Dutch proposals silent in 1655.

Nevertheless, despite its heavily ritualised and bureaucratised nature, the tributary audience at court could be a potent opportunity for foreign and domestic actors to play out their geopolitical conflicts with military aid and technologies as leverage. As the early modern period dawned in East Asia, the court in Beijing became a place where representatives from far-flung polities like the Dutch Republic and the Ottoman empire increasingly asserted themselves and their interests. There they found themselves immediately in conflict with the already established interests of the Portuguese, the international missionary order of the Jesuits, and domestic political factions with interests in foreign maritime trade. Conversely, for the Chinese court this was a confrontation with geopolitical struggles between European powers which transcended the East Asian context of the tributary system.

Unless new documentation is discovered, especially from the point of view of the Ottomans or the Portuguese, the background and intentions of the embassies will remain subject of speculation. But when we consider the fate of the Ottoman military expert Duosima and his technology and compare it with similar diplomatic transactions close in time, a certain pattern of securitisation becomes clear, casting the officialdom in the role of the securitising agent and the emperor as audience.

At the basis of this role division was a somewhat contradictory and contentious notion of rulership professed by the civil bureaucracy, which theoretically recognised

<sup>79</sup> Ma (2007: 75–6); Swope (2008: 61–115).



the emperor's omnipotence, but in practice preferred for him to function like a rubber-stamp institute. The securitising agents were almost always members of the civilian elite and their securitisation strategies usually indirectly reveal their class interests. The same held true when a foreigner found himself in a rare similar position: Adam Schall von Bell was clearly defending the interests of the Jesuits and the Portuguese at Macao when he painted the Dutch as a potential threat to imperial security. In terms of securitisation strategies, the crux was controlling the audience's perceptions: it was often more important what the emperor could not see than what he could see. Thus, successful securitisation depended on controlling the emperor's perceptions, his access to knowledge, in this case about the weaponry, and the access of others to his person. But the emperor was not the only audience of import during instances of military diplomacy. A second important audience concerned potential adversaries, and Chinese officials were keenly aware that the acceptance of military diplomatic initiatives by the empire could have a deleterious effect on its military deterrence. At the same time military cooperation posed a security risk through the opportunities for intelligence gathering it presented. As such, the theory of securitisation, developed to explain the discursive creation of threats in modern nation-states, is also a useful heuristic tool to shed light on similar processes that took place in early modern empires.

While one of the main points of this article is stressing the importance of the tribute system as a channel for military transfer, it must also be noted that many technological appropriations were accidental, or occurred outside of any official agency and institutions. Asia in the 16th century seemed to be awash with Ottoman and Portuguese mercenaries and merchants, who had no qualms about selling their skills and weapons to the highest bidder. From the perspective of imperial security this was a double-edged sword. It meant that officials operating on the coast were able to gain access to new gunpowder weapons—like the Portuguese *harquebus*—on their own terms, thereby bypassing the restricted access to this technology imposed by the centralising efforts of early Ming emperors, which had also limited access to the Ottoman military technology and expertise. The more positive side of the equation was that this kind of transfer came without any geopolitical strings attached. Freedom from political consequences therefore meant freedom of transfer, which possibly explains the 30-year delay in adopting Duosima's Ottoman musket and the successful securitising strategy that might have been behind it. Moreover, the fact that Duosima was instrumental in the transfer of a potent new weapon to Ming China also nuances the idea, still commonly held by modern historians, that Europeans possessed a unique military superiority over the rest of the world and therefore only their military technology was disseminated. Not only Europeans drove military innovation and changes across the world. The case of Duosima proves that non-Europeans could play a role in processes of military changes as well. Nevertheless, after all this time the original political goals behind his embassy, for which the weapons might have been intended

as leverage, had lost their relevance: by now Duosima was the Ming emperor's man, and no longer the Ottoman sultan's subject.

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