

Xiaobing Li. *The Dragon in the Jungle: The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xv + 320 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-068161-6.



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Published on H-War (October, 2022)

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The historiography of the Vietnam War has typically focused on Vietnam, both North and South, and the United States. Xiaobing Li works to broaden this focus by bringing Chinese involvement into the narrative in his book, *The Dragon in the Jungle*. Expanding the historiography of the conflict helps to bring it onto a more global stage, as China worked toward modernization and technological advancement within its military and state during the 1960s and into the 1970s. During the period of assistance, the Chinese denied any involvement in Vietnam. Other communist countries, such as the Soviet Union, also aided but denied any participation. Support from outside communist governments included material, financial, and technological aid. In June 1965 the Chinese Volunteers Forces to Assist Vietnam (CVFAV) entered North Vietnam. Three years later the Chinese entered Laos to assist with maintenance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Li uses Chinese materials--previously inaccessible outside China--to highlight the numbers and types of Chinese troops sent to "aid" the Viet-

namese against the United States. He also brings the histories of the involved units into the narrative of Chinese involvement in North Vietnam. One of the key elements suggested throughout the text is the projection of defense of the Chinese state beyond the borders of the nation. Li also presents societal influences on the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the inverse as factors in the changes which took place during the period of assistance to the Vietnamese. Throughout the book, which consists of an introduction, seven chapters, and conclusion, Li utilizes maps and charts to help readers visualize the operational movements of support troops and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) units. The support troops highlighted throughout the book are mainly engineering troops who assisted with roadway construction and maintenance as well as railroad engineers and coastal defense engineers. Li points out that, according to Chinese documents, the intent was for the Chinese to aid, not to join in ground combat operations against the United States. The introduction and first chapter relate the history of the People's Re-

public of China (PRC) and its developing defensive strategy as it consolidated the gains of the late 1940s and 1950s. The decisions developed into Mao's active defense ideology.

Li attributes the decision to assist the Vietnamese as part of Mao's strategy of active defense of China through the projection of force to proactively maintain a defense beyond the border. This allowed operational flexibility to the commanders in the field to utilize resources—both men and material—to counter the technological gaps between China, Vietnam, and the United States. The active defense of China's southern border gained significance when, in 1965, the United States began Operation Rolling Thunder against North Vietnam, which Li picks up in chapter 2. The assistance effort opened a military and technological conflict with the United States and a political conflict with the Soviet Union.

In chapter 3, Li focuses on the command-and-control aspects of the air defense campaign of the Chinese AAA units in North Vietnam. Chapter 4 then moves to address the bridging of the technological gaps faced by Chinese support units in Vietnam and the military overall. In chapter 5 the discussion moves to the significance of communication and transportation. This chapter looks at Hanoi's efforts to improve the lines of communication and transportation to maintain its connections with soldiers in transit south and to maintain supplies once they arrived on southern battlefields. Chapter 6 shifts the focus to the sea and the coastal support China worked to improve. The use of coastal defense and maritime shipping to provide supplies held a twofold purpose: the first was to help protect the rapid movement of supplies to the Vietnamese and the second was to set up a forward deployed capability for the Chinese to influence the region from the sea. In chapter 7, Li highlights the growing mutual support between the Vietnamese and Chinese as well as the growing disagreements leading to the questioning of the relationship between Vietnam and China as US

involvement declined. Tensions between the two nations were never resolved and created fractures that would open in the future. The future tensions hinted at here were the result of unresolved issues during the period of assistance.

Throughout, Li highlights the combination of an active projection of defense, modernization efforts, and Cold War global politics, which buffeted and reformed China's leadership, military, and China itself. Li works to demonstrate the maneuvering on multiple levels, from the local to the international, that helped the PLA to weather the drastic and chaotic changes of China's assistance to North Vietnam to influence the future of China's international relations and standing on a global stage. Li concludes that without the assistance effort in Vietnam, the Chinese military would not have grown into one of the largest and most technologically advanced forces in the world.

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Citation: John Aylesworth. Review of Li, Xiaobing. *The Dragon in the Jungle: The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. October, 2022.

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