China’s Aid to Vietnam, 1955–1965
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Abstract. The period between 1955 and 1965 saw major adjustment of China’s aid to Vietnam, which were relatively limited at the beginning with low-interest loan representing large proportion. The Chinese Government, however, under necessity of continuous adjustments of amounts of such aid, finally identified the general policy of massive aid in 1965 amid growing tension in Indochina accompanied by intensifying US interference in Vietnamese affairs and the adjustment of soviet Vietnam policy. Since then, China’s aid to Vietnam had been generally predominated by non-reimbursable assistance, which was also in increasing scale.

Introduction
The period between 1955 and 1965 witnessed the adjustments and changes of China’s aid to Vietnam. On the one hand, despite that it was the year 1955 when the first Indochina War was already brought to the truce a year ago, peace in this region tended to be broken due to the USA’s violation of the Geneva Accord and its efforts to foster the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in southern Vietnam. On the other hand, by 1965, China had begun to expand significantly its economic and military aid to Vietnam by adjusting its diplomatic strategy amid the split of Sino-Soviet relations and the USA’s overall escalation of the Vietnam War. China’s aid to Vietnam featured the mix of non-reimbursement assistance and low-interest loan and then the former as a dominant form: from irregular to annually constant aids, and from relatively limited amounts to significant increase in the scale. With regard this subject, relevant studies are humble academically. In general, Chinese scholars focus more on the aid to Vietnam during the first Indochina war. As far as Chinese academic community is concerned, Guo Ming discussed the Sino-Vietnamese relations from 1950 to 1990 in the early 1990s, but without systematic discussions about the issue concerning China’s aid to Vietnam (Guo 1990). Afterwards, Li Danhui’s studies reflected the change in China’s aid to Vietnam. But the focus was on Sino-Soviet dispute on providing aid to Vietnam between 1961 and 1973 (Li 2000). Yang Kuisong mainly focused on the issues concerning Sino-Vietnamese relations and China’s Vietnam policy in the 1950s and 1960s, and on few contents about China’s aid (Yang 2001).

There are also no special systematic studies in overseas academic community. Chen Jian elaborated on China’s supports and assistance to Vietnam between 1964 and 1969, but without focus on the period between 1955 and 1965 (Chen 1995). Zhai Qiang, by using large amounts of Chinese documents, analyzed the differences in viewing bilateral relations between China and Vietnam, without systematic study of China’s aid (Zhai 2000). Zhang Xiaoming mainly focused more on the differences and the military conflicts between China and Vietnam (Zhang 2015). And some Vietnamese works did not mention the issue over China’s aid at all (Luu 1996, 2000). To conclude, the international academic community remains weak to some extent in the research of this issue.

China’s Early Aid to Vietnam
In July 1949, Liu Shaoqi made a secret visit to Moscow. And Stalin specially mentioned the division of revolution to Liu at a banquet on the belief that the center of revolution had shifted from the West to the East and then to China and East Asia. He proposed: “For the sake of international
revolution, China and the USSR should identify their division: China shall focus on the issues concerning the East and colonial and semi-colonial countries by exerting its due efforts and influences. And the USSR shall perform more duties on the issues concerning the West, which is, in general, the incumbent international obligation of the USSR.” This international division had for long become the consensus between the two countries in dealing with issues concerning revolution in Asia. Even during the administration of Khrushchev, the USSR had not long got involved in the Vietnam War. Therefore, Vietnam mainly relied on China’s aid before the end of 1964.

After the founding of the P.R.C., the new-born regime faced the issue over aid to Vietnam. In November 1949, Vietnam send two delegates to visit China to restart the relationship between both parties ever interrupted due to their respective wars of liberation. Besides, Vietnam also requested the aid of equipment and other materials for three divisions, and 10 million dollars. Considering international obligations and revolutionary friendship, China was unlikely to decline such aid to Vietnam. However, China was indeed in no position to provide massive aid given the fresh founding of the PRC, which called for all-round recovery from years of wars and turmoil and was also in need of Soviet aid. For this reason, on December 25, the CPC Central Committee telegraphed the Communist Central Committee of Indochina, saying that “China was very willing to provide some assistance” but without specific amounts except intention to send representatives to Vietnam for exchanges on relevant matters in the hope of agreement of Vietnam.

Afterwards, however, following the fast outbreak of the Korean War, the Chinese Government plunged into the struggle against US aggression to aid Korea, which made China couldn’t give Vietnam massive assistance. And then, following the Korean Armistice Agreement signed in July 1953, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence published by the Chinese Government and the entry of the Geneva Accord in 1954, to reduce military conflicts and keep peace became the consensus between China and the USSR. Such being the case, China was unlikely to give extensive aid to Vietnam, especially in military, to avoid breaking the hard-won peace. Therefore, despite China’s uninterrupted aid to Vietnam and that China had long served as the major country to aid Vietnam, such aid had always been relatively limited in scale.

Since the USA rejected to sign the Geneva Accord and fostered the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1955, however, peace in Indochina was broken again. For this reason, China had begun to expand the aid to Vietnam. Take military aid as an example. The equipment provided before 1956, was predominated by second-hand weapons of various models, which were gradually replaced by new models and other military materials after 1956. But overall, China’s military aid was in limited scale before 1963, which worth 0.32 billion yuan for northern Vietnam between 1956 and 1963. Besides, its economic aid to Vietnam was also relatively limited. In the Sino-Vietnamese Joint Announcement signed on July 7, 1955, China decides to donate 0.8 billion yuan to Vietnam for the restoration of the country. Despite such large sum, the commitment to this aid was not fulfilled in one year. And the assisted 18 construction and modification of industrial projects, approved by the Chinese Government on March 31, 1958, were just funded by the commitment three years ago.

Hence, China’s economic aid to Vietnam was predominated by low-interest loan. On February 28, 1959, China agreed to provide low-loan worth 0.3 billion yuan for Vietnam, which was effective between 1958 and 1962 and repaid in ten years with annual interest of 1%. In addition, on the same day, China agreed to grant 0.1 billion yuan as non-reimbursable aid to Vietnam. By January 31, 1961, China agreed one more time to provide low-interest loan worth 0.14175 billion rupees, which was effective between 1961 and 1967 and repaid in ten years with annual interest of 1%.

The Adjustment of China’s Aid to Vietnam

By 1962, the CPC identified the diplomatic strategy featuring struggles in two directions—against both imperialism and revisionism. Together with the US growing intervention in Vietnamese affairs, Mao Zedong was strengthening China’s commitment to aiding Vietnam to fight to the end. In meeting the Vietnamese military delegation led by Vo Nguyen Giap on October 5, 1962, Mao...
encouraged Vietnam to continue struggle: “Another five to ten years’ struggle will further strain the USA and then they have to compromise at the Geneva conference you propose.” And Mao stressed several times in the talks China’s commitment to Vietnam: “We help each other to jointly defeat the enemy. In any case, we are in the same boat. And our mutual support remains certain.” Since then, military cooperation between China and Vietnam became increasingly close. During the visit of Van Tien Dung, Chief of Staff of People’s Army of Vietnam in July 1963, the two countries signed relevant documents on the cooperative engagement of both armies and the agreement on China’s military aid to Vietnam.

Then, leaders of communist party of China, Vietnam and Laos established general principles of joint resistance against US aggression at the conference held in Hanoi between July 3 and 5, 1964. Zhou Enlai emphasized at the conference: “We are committed to trying to control the war within the current limit and getting well prepared for any possibility of local war escalated from special war by the USA.” And China will stick to the principle that “it acts according to and in response to USA's specific action.” By July 27, Mao said again in meeting the Vietnamese delegation: “China will not sit idle if the USA is on the offensive against northern Vietnam. And it has to consider China’s decision to send troops and instant deployment of such assistance if it wanted to do so in northern Vietnam.”

The outbreak of Gulf of Tonkin Incident in August 1964, and the change of soviet political situation finally prompted China to changes its policy on the aid to Vietnam. Following the leave of Khrushchev in a coup in October 1964 and the coming of Brezhnev, the new soviet leader, began to vigorously intervene in Vietnamese affairs. On November 26, the TASS published a statement, expressing USSR’s readiness to give “necessary aid” to Vietnam. A week later, Brezhnev condemned US aggression against Vietnam in a speech and expressed that the USSR would not “show indifference” but prepared to provide “necessary aid” to Vietnam. Between February 6 and 10 the next year, Kosygin, chairman of Soviet council of ministers discussed issue concerning Soviet aid to Vietnam with Vietnamese leaders including Ho Chi Minh, Le Dung, Truong Chinh and Pham Van Dong, and signed relevant agreements during his visit to Hanoi. And the USSR announced in the Soviet-Vietnam joint declaration that the USSR would not keep indifferent to Vietnamese security but give necessary assistance and supports. Between April 10 and 17 after two months, Le Dung visited Moscow. And in the joint declaration, Vietnam and the USSR reached agreement on further steps to safeguard Vietnamese sovereignty; the USSR prepared to go ahead with necessary aid to Vietnam; and the USSR would approve its citizens to be part of Vietnamese efforts in the war when necessary. And on July 12, they also signed in Moscow an agreement on USSR’s efforts in promoting economic development and building up defense capacity of Vietnam.

With the adjustment of Moscow’s policy and further close intensifying relations between the USSR and Vietnam, China showed growingly positive attitude towards the aid. After the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, China agreed to donate free foreign exchange worth 10 million rubles on December 7. On February 10, 1965, Chinese leaders including Mao attended the mass assembly of 1.5 million at Tiananmen Square to condemn the USA for its aggression against Vietnam. Three days later, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De and Zhou Enlai expressed in the telegraph to Moscow that “the two countries must unite closely to resolutely support the people in Vietnam and Indochina as a whole in the armed struggles against US aggression”. In the late March, Zhou Enlai gave public speech, expressing China determined to provide all necessary substantial aid for the Vietnamese people, including weapons and other military materials. Then, with a view to unifying and strengthening the leadership of the aid to Vietnam, the Leading Group for Aid to Vietnam under CPC Central Committee was established in May, with Zhou Enlai as the practical chief.

**China Increased Aid to Vietnam**

China also adjusted its budgets of external aid to serve the program of aid to Vietnam. The 1965 budget was originally 1.4 billion yuan, and the figure was adjusted as 1.8 billion yuan and 2.16 billion yuan in April and June respectively. And the scale of aid in 1965 far exceeded that in 1964. On March 2, China agreed to provide 10 million dollars of gratuitous free foreign exchanges for
Vietnam. On May 30, China agreed to provide Vietnam with gratuitous aid of building 12 roads, 1,782 km long totally. And then, just on July 13, China and Vietnam signed an agreement involving a large-sum aid, according to which China agreed to provide non-reimbursable aid worth 1 billion yuan instantly. In December, they also signed two agreements. According to the former, China agreed to provide 85-million-ruble worth of low-interest loan between 1965 and 1966. And in the latter, China agreed to provide 10 million dollars in 1966.

Correspondingly, China’s military aid to Vietnam also increased significantly. As to various types of guns, the number was 80,500 in 1964, and in 1965, the figure increased to 220,767, with number of various kinds of bullets increasing from 25.24 million to 114.01 million, by 174.24% and 351.7% respectively. As to various types of canons, the number surged from 1,205 in 1964 to 4,439 in 1965, with number of various kinds of shells increasing from 0.335 million to 1.8 million, by 268.38% and 437.31% respectively. As to motor vehicles, the number increased from 25 in 1964 to 114 in 1965, by 356%. Besides, upon the request by Vietnam, China sent the first batch of aiding-Vietnam troops to Vietnam in June 1965. In March 1968, China sent a total number of over 0.32 million support forces (up to a record over 0.17 million in a year) to Vietnam, involving air defense, engineering, railway and logistics. By then, the Chinese Government massively increased aid to Vietnam.

Conclusion
The decade between 1955 and 1965 featured increasing adjustments of China’s policies and efforts concerning aid to Vietnam before the final establishment of general principle. In the beginning, China hoped to keep the aid within a proper range—to both fulfill its international obligations and avoid any harm to the security and peace in Indochina. With growing US interference in Vietnamese affairs, however, the relatively limited aid could not counterbalance the US policy on escalation of war. The outbreak of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and change of Soviet Vietnam policy brought surging demand on China’s aid. China needed to provide massive aid to Vietnamese people to cope with US escalation of the Vietnam War, and had to prevent the USSR from courting Vietnam. All this finally led to the significant increase of aid to Vietnam in 1965 by China.

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References


