

*Cold War Crucible:
The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*

by Masuda Hajimu

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015

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The so-called Cold War history is one of the burgeoning fields in the studies of contemporary history. The literature belonging to this relatively new field, contrary to older and traditional approaches to the Cold War, does not see the conflict simply in terms of the military and diplomatic competition between the two superpowers, but seeks to capture the various dimensions of the era, including domestic politics,¹ economies,²

¹ Central works on the Cold War American domestic politics are Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World. American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Colleen Doody, *Detroit's Cold War: The Origins of Postwar Conservatism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2009). For the Soviet domestic society, see Marilyn S. Kushner, "Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959: Domestic Politics and Cultural Diplomacy," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002), Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002), Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd eds., *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

² Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of United States-Philippines Relations, 1942-1960* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Randall W. Stone,

and cultural relations.³ Also, its focus is geographically broadened to other regions of the Cold War world, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which previous studies generally did not consider as protagonists on the stage.⁴ Even Europe is being revitalized in the recent Cold War

Satellites and Commissars: Strategy and Conflict in the Politics of Soviet-Bloc Trade (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Ragna Boden, "Cold War Economics: Soviet Aid to Indonesia," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 3 (2008); David S. Painter, "Oil, Resources, and the Cold War, 1945-62," in O. A. Westad and M. Leffler eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³ The literature on the Cold War culture is already rich. A pioneering work is Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Other key works includes; Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible. American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Diplomacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). For a more cultural-oriented approach, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁴ The most influential work is undoubtedly Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Also see Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds. The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Matthew Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Robert J. McMahon ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For works focusing more on the Soviet side, see Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnamese Relations and the Role of China, 1949-64* (London: Routledge, 2006); Vladimir Shulbin, *The Hot "Cold" War: The USSR in Southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West*

historiography, challenging the old notion that it was just an arena between the two superpowers, not an active player in the Cold War politics.⁵ Related to such trends is the recent emphasis among Cold War historians on various transnational and non-state actors in making the Cold War. In the past, many of the Cold War studies were about United States policymakers (these studies were pejoratively called a history of the US Department of State) or Soviet Party leaders. Now journalists, academicians, artists, sports stars, exchange students, missionaries, and even ordinary people are treated as major actors in the Cold War world.⁶ Finally, some new studies have begun to question the concept of the Cold War itself, calling for attention to uneven experiences, meanings, and timeframes that the world had in that period.⁷ Phrases such as “the other Cold War” or “deconstruction of the Cold War” challenges previous conventional understanding of the Cold War as a single and universal competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The book under review is an outstanding example of such new scholarship. Masuda Hajimu, professor of history at National University of Singapore, does a marvelous job in repainting the early Cold War

Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁵ John W. Young, “Western Europe and the end of the Cold War, 1979-89,” in O. A. Westad and M. Leffler eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jussi M. Hanhimaki, *Containing Coexistence America, Russia, and the “Finnish Solution,” 1945-1956* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997). More broadly, Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

⁶ Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *All You Need Is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blow up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Sarah Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁷ Matthew Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*; Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

world. His study is neither about the Korean War per se nor about complicated diplomatic relations surrounding the war. Rather, it is a creative combination of political, social, and local histories of the key countries linked with the war in the Korean peninsula, most notably, the United States, Japan, and China. His main argument is that the Cold War was the historical reality imagined and constructed by ordinary people or “the public” after the outbreak of the Korean War, not a given military and diplomatic conflict in the post-World War II years. Before that, there were “a number of disputable perspectives” in the societies and there was no “the Cold War” that the later generations readily internalized as the given international condition in their time. After the summer of 1950, however, “the Cold War” became the reality. In such a tremendous transition, Masuda argues, ordinary people played key roles through their imagination of the East-West conflicts, activities in various kinds of political movements, and, most importantly, participation in local “social struggles and cultural wars” in their domestic society. Those people utilized the Korean War, which produced fear of a third world war by bringing back memories of the Second World War, as an opportunity to quell various kinds of social and cultural demands and return to a previous order. In this sense, the Korean War was a catalyst for the Cold War, but more fundamental to the process was the mood of the “general public.”

To prove such original arguments, Masuda seems to have conducted a great deal of archival work in various countries and explored a myriad of documents published in both the Eastern and Western worlds. His main sources are public discourse, such as press materials, memoirs, letters, and other materials. In particular, local newspapers in the early Cold War world are the most critical to him because his main interest resides in the role of local people in making the Cold War reality. Those literary sources are backed by governmental reports, statistics, poll results, and visual materials such as cartoons. When he discusses the relationship between public opinions and policymaking, he considers official governmental documents, as well.

Masuda divides the book into the three parts largely in a chronological order. In the first part, he deals with the postwar world prior to the outbreak of the Korean War. The second part is devoted to an analysis of the “popular attitudes” from summer 1950, when the Korean War broke out, to winter 1950, and an examination of the relationship between them and policymaking. Also, the latter portion of the second part revisits the propaganda activities at that time. The final, third part provides an alternative explanation of the repressions and purges conducted roughly from 1950 to 1951 in the United States, China, Japan, and Great Britain, as well as in Taiwan and the Philippines.

As Masuda’s book has many intriguing and new interpretations on those issues, it is worthwhile here to follow the content of the book in a more detailed manner. In Chapter 1, Masuda describes the postwar social atmospheres in the United States, Japan, and China and, most impressively, displays the interplay among them. Immediately after the Second World War, various social and cultural issues, such as race, gender, and labor, came to the fore and some changes in those areas seemed plausible in the countries. However, according to Masuda, the majority of population in the United States reacted to such demands in a negative way and developed a sort of “conservative backlash.” Their reaction was clearly expressed in the 1946 mid-term election in which the Republican Party gained a sweeping victory over “New Dealish” Democrats and the Progressive Party. Critical to the process was the development of the “anti-communist” and “(Un) American” discourse set, through which any dissident from the social order could be labelled as a pro-Soviet. Such a right turn in the United States changed Japan, where reform-minded political forces had been rising since the end of the war. After the 1946 mid-term election, however, conservative elements in Japanese society returned, and they made the reform-oriented politics look like “the result of communist manipulation,” ultimately paving the way for the so-called “Reverse Course” adopted by the United States occupation administration in 1947. In this sense, the “Reverse Course,” Masuda emphasizes, was not simply imposed by

Washington, but “primarily a process of local struggle among Japanese.” This right turn seemed like a product of America’s policy shift at that time also had a strong impact on China, where it produced anti-American sentiment and an anti-American movement. While the previous scholarship generally linked this phenomenon to the activities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Masuda challenges such a conventional interpretation, arguing that it was originated and developed at a grassroots level. In postwar America, though, such anti-Americanism in China was not perceived as a grassroots social movement but simply as a sign of the expansion of Moscow. According to Masuda, however, such turns in those countries did not yet create a general consensus. There still existed differing ideas and viewpoints in the United States, Japan, and China before the outbreak of the Korean War. “If nothing unusual had happened in the summer of 1950,” those societies would have been quite different from the so-called Cold War ones.

Chapter 2 deals with how the Korean War was differently translated in various countries, such as Korea, the United States, China, and others. In the United States and Western Europe, it brought about the “fear of World War III” as they thought that the war meant a direct challenge from Moscow. However, in China and other countries that experienced colonial rule by a Western power, the war, in particular, America’s entry into the Korean War signified the resurrection of imperialism. Such different translations, Masuda stresses, were due to the “local experiences, contexts and political languages and needs,” namely, the domestic situations and memories in those countries.

In Chapters 3 and 4, entitled “Cold War Fantasy” and “Politics of Impression,” respectively, Masuda challenges the conventional notion in Cold War studies that policymakers’ ideas and policy implementation brought about the Cold War which, in turn, had great aftereffects on societies. According to him, rather, the opposite is closer to the historical truth. In many cases, ordinary people were ahead of their politicians. And the active involvement and participation of local people, directly and

indirectly, pushed policymakers in certain directions. In the case of the United States, the anti-communist climate in the United States domestic society was critical to the decision to press the offensive into North Korea, namely, crossing the 38th parallel after the Inchon landing. As for the CCP, the “instable” social atmosphere propelled by the American army’s advance into North Korea and expressed in ongoing rumors about Chiang Kai-shek’s possible counterattack on the mainland, various kinds of challenges to the CCP’s rule, and some doubts about its legitimacy pushed the leadership to decide to enter the Korean War. Their decision to advance to the South after their initial victory in the northern part of the peninsula in late 1950 was also taken due to their concern regarding the social atmosphere in China. In short, the CCP’s decisions, previously interpreted as products of diplomatic or military considerations, were actually made in order to “hold on to favorable popular impressions” of the CCP.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the propaganda activities concerning the Korean War which were conducted in the United States and in China from the fall of 1950. American domestic society witnessed the “widespread fear of World War III and the fantasy of the Cold War” after the breakout of the war. According to Masuda, such sentiment was a product less of top-down propaganda directed by the American policymakers than the politics of “truth-making campaign” where ordinary American people played a key role. Because of their old prejudice against Chinese and Asians as submissive and dependent, they continued to see China merely as a tool of Moscow, which was critical in terms of war mobilization. Meanwhile, ordinary Chinese people perceived America based upon their own experiences and memories of Japanese imperialism. A campaign called “Resist America and Aid Korea,” which began from late 1950, was not simply imposed by the CCP’s leadership but developed largely by local actors who cherished anti-colonial sentiment and tended to equate the United States forces with Japanese imperialism.

Despite such massive popular participation in propaganda activities in the United States and China as well as other countries, according to

Masuda, there was still “an undisputable portion of population” which still held differing viewpoints. “To resolve such disputes in society,” each country took “more direct and brutal” measures. These measures are the subject of the third and final part of the book. Chapter 7 briefly touches upon the large-scale massacres committed in Korea during the war, and then moves on to McCarthyism in the United States. Chapter 8 deals with the postwar British labor disputes and the subsequent settlements, and the so-called “Red Purge” in Japan. The purge movement against the “counterrevolutionaries” conducted in China from the fall of 1950 to the summer of 1951 is discussed in Chapter 9.

The final chapter of the main body deals with the “anti-communist” punishments in the former colonies, namely, Taiwan and the Philippines. In all four chapters, Masuda highlights one critical point: those repressions and purges, which have been interpreted merely as an aftereffect of the Cold War, contained “social” elements. They reflected the existing social conflicts, which had deepened from the period of the Great Depression and the Second World War in the cases of the United States and Western countries, or from the “colonial” era in case of other societies, and demonstrated local and ordinary people’s choice of “returning to a state of social order and custom.” The bipolar Cold War logic was all over the place in those movements, but it was adopted and utilized by ordinary people, in a manner less political than social, to restore and maintain conventional or orderly way of life in their domestic societies. In this vein, the purges came to have broader targets, namely, not just communists, but also any element that seemed to try to block “the return of ordinary life,” such as socio-cultural activists, religious sects, peasant rebels, and even common criminals. In short, those movements in the era of the “imagined” Cold War were, according to Masuda, grassroots social punishments to normalize or purify their own societies.

Revisiting key historiographical issues in the early Cold War world, Masuda convincingly presents alternative answers and successfully broadens our understanding of the era by deconstructing the simple Cold

War framework and by wearing domestic and local lenses. His “international” history is truly impressive. Beyond traditional diplomatic relations, his story shows interactions among the different societies and highlights domestic contexts in individual nations. However, there are still several problems that he could have addressed in his book. First, when he uses terminology such as the “general public,” “popular attitudes,” or sometimes even “social need,” further elaborations seem to be needed. Masuda implies that there was a majority group in these societies in the postwar world and it was their decision to return to normalcy and the previous order against the challenges from reform-oriented forces or people who demanded changes. But Masuda never clearly describes who those people were. If they really represented “the majority of the population” or “a large portion of the population,” as he puts it, readers might want to know more about their socio-economic status, cultural backgrounds, and political orientations.

While his “international” approach to the societies in the United States, Japan, and China is more than impressive, it is necessary to be more cautious in directly comparing those countries in the postwar years for their political systems and ideas were obviously uneven. In the case of the United States, it certainly had a democratic and “liberal” system in a Western sense, which was probably more sensitive to the public mood, as Masuda suggests. On the contrary, the CCP’s leaders belonged to the tradition of Marxism-Leninism in which they saw themselves as a vanguard or an enlightening force of the population, namely, as an organizer or agitator of public attitudes. While I more than agree with Masuda regarding the point that the Communist society (or the actual military dictatorship like postwar Japan) could not completely control the public mood, there should have been enormous dissimilarities between the United States and China in terms of the ways in which public attitudes were manifested and became a factor in forging actual policies. In short, the public sphere in America might be quite different from those in China and Japan in the postwar world. Also, there is another comparison

problem. While the “anti-communist” movements of the United States, Japan, and Taiwan can be nicely subsumed under the notion of “returning to order,” that is hardly the case for the purge in China from 1950 to 1951. Rather, the Chinese case seems to be closer to a volatile social eruption in the post-revolutionary period, than a “conservative backlash” for social order. It is hard to juxtapose societies coming out of the wartime turmoil with societies driven by (socialist) revolutionary zeal and energy.

Regarding methodology, it would have been more interesting if Masuda had chosen to include a more specific discursive-oriented analysis of his documents in this work. While he certainly owes much to the so-called “cultural turn” of the diplomatic history field, he rarely pushes his project beyond “the social” towards “the cultural.” Masuda basically treats languages in a traditional way: they are a tool that actors select and utilize for their own purposes. He does not pay the keenest attention to a constructive power of languages; actors (or subjects) in the postwar world could be possibly shaped and molded by the Cold War discourse sets.⁸ Finally, the Korean case should have been more represented in his book, not just because the Korean War is a key event for his book but because Korea was the country in which the United States’ “anti-communist” policy was first adopted, that is, much earlier than the “Reverse Course” in Japan.⁹ The case would have enriched his picture and made it even more interesting.

These criticisms do not alter in the least the fact that this book represents a significant academic achievement. *Cold War Crucible* is a great addition and resounding contribution to the recent historiography of the Cold War.

⁸ A good example for this methodology is Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁹ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).