

Book Review

Masuda Hajimu. *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World.* Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2015. 400 pp. + 32 halftones. ISBN: 978-0674598478. \$39.95 cloth.

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Historians examining any issue related to the Cold War might want to choose a different topic. Masuda Hajimu makes this unintentional recommendation when he argues that the Cold War was “an imagined reality.” His goal is “to rewrite the formation of the Cold War through synthesizing social and diplomatic history and local and global history” (2). This is not a book about the Korean War, which first surfaces after two chapters. Instead, Masuda concentrates on describing social, political, and cultural patterns domestically in the United States, Japan, Britain, China, and Taiwan from 1945 until 1951 to demonstrate that “the concept of the Cold War was, in essence, a series of local understandings of the world” (81). He emphasizes that his study “does not treat popular myths, rumors, and emotions among everyday people merely as *effects* of the Cold War; rather, it casts light on them as *factors creating* the ‘reality’ of the conflict” (4). Most important, memories of World War II caused people living in the most devastated countries to think that the Korean War was the start of another world conflagration. Masuda’s main thesis holds that this fear allowed “grassroots conservatives” to fight and suppress “various kinds of postwar change under the name of the global Cold War confrontation ...” (8).

A major strength of this book is Masuda’s placement of the Korean War in a global context, setting it apart from most studies of the conflict. His account provides powerful insights on how local events guided the thoughts and behavior of common people around the world in reacting to the Cold War, rather than the other way around. Another obvious asset is its extraordinary research. Masuda has consulted not only archival collections in ten different nations, including the United States, Japan, China, and Britain, but also an enormous list of secondary works from authors in various countries. He also has inserted into the narrative twelve excellent photographs of Chinese, American, and Japanese protesters, as well as eighteen enlightening cartoons and two posters. Joining other innovative scholars studying world affairs from the bottom up, Masuda begins by describing the October 1946 strike of sugar plantation workers in Hawaii, initiating a pattern of presenting the perspective of common people

who watched or participated in historic incidents and events. Most informative and insightful are the last four chapters, where Masuda describes a postwar pattern of “Social Warfare” (199). McCarthyism in the United States, the Red Purge in Japan, the “Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries” in China, the White Terror in Taiwan, and parallel events in Britain and the Philippines all involved “punishment of local people, based on existing conflicts that were rekindled at the time of the Korean War” (200). Masuda’s prose is clear and direct, but repetitive, with the phrases “in other word” and “viewed in this way” seeming to appear on every other page. He also uses the word “verisimilitude” with annoying frequency.

Masuda smugly sweeps aside a vast literature on several important topics in advancing new interpretations that all attribute the decisions of postwar world leaders to domestic political pressures. For example, he contends that General Douglas MacArthur stopped reforming Japan late in 1946 after the Republican mid-term election victory and the backlash against the Oakland general strike. The “Reverse Course” also “was less a result of Washington’s Cold War policy than part of a conservative backlash in Japan aimed at the recovery of normalcy and familiar order” (37). Masuda attributes a reluctant President Harry S. Truman’s decision to cross the 38th parallel to Republican pressures for an aggressive policy in Korea. Alleging that NSC 81 merely “suggested” (94) invading North Korea, he mistakenly insists without evidence that Truman did not decide to do so until September 29. Less questionable is his assertion that China had to enter the Korean War because if it did not, “the majority of supportive elements could ... lose confidence in [Communist] programs, and at the same time undesirable elements in society could rise up, possibly damaging [Communist] legitimacy at home” (132). But Masuda cites no document to substantiate his claim that before October 6, 1950, “... Beijing’s leadership had already confirmed China’s entry into the war” after making the decision “in a series of CCP Central Committee Politburo meetings, held on October 4 and 5 in Zhongnanhai” (135).

Key arguments in this study are more imaginary than Masuda’s conception of “the fantasy of the Cold War” (151). His contention that “anti-communist politics in the late 1940s appears rather nonchalant and even casual” (55) ignores both Truman’s loyalty probe and the hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Masuda characterizes repression in the name of anti-communism after World War II as exceptional, when even the Red Scare of 1919-1920 had historical precedents. A fundamentally flawed argument declares that “fear of World War III did not develop in areas that did not directly experience the devastation of World War II, and ... a belief in the Cold War did not take root in those regions, either” (70). Cold War convictions arguably were

strongest in the United States, but it suffered no “devastation” in World War II. Russia certainly did, yet Masuda never describes postwar internal affairs in the Soviet Union. A Korean author’s book is the only source for his stunning revelation that U.S. and South Korean military officers submitted the blueprint for the Inchon landing before the Korean War. In sum, this study provides no reason for *Cold War History* or the *Journal of Cold War Studies* to cease publishing articles about an event that was both real and significant in human history.