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By John Delury, Taehwan Kim

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Cold War Crucible

The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World
Masuda Hajimu



WAR ENDURED IN THE IMAGINATION

Masuda Hajimu at the National University of Singapore starts his revisionist study of Cold War Asia with a deceptively simple premise: the Cold War only existed because people believed it so. It was as much a consciousness as a conflict. From this constructivist starting point — the Cold War as a giant “imagined community” — Masuda plunges into the domestic politics and cultural life of Japan, China and the United States, in order explain why each society bought into the idea of a global war for or against communism.

Equally at home in the languages and archives of Tokyo, Beijing and Washington, and emphasizing the catalytic role of the Korean War, he crafts a transnational story that links Asia into a worldwide struggle. His central thesis is that the global Cold War was constructed out of local campaigns to suppress progressive movements and social causes that had gained ground in the 1940s. This was as true, he argues, in communist societies like China as in the capitalist US. He concludes by suggesting the global conflict of our own day — our “clash of civilizations” — is cut from the same Cold War cloth of a “gigantic social construction” designed on both sides to enforce domestic order in the name of global liberation.

Such an ambitious, revisionist interpretation will require more research before gaining acceptance, but in opening up such lines of inquiry, Masuda has contributed significantly to how we think about the social history behind great power and global conflict.

Reviewed by John Delury, Associate Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies and book reviews co-editor for Global Asia.

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