



2015-096

Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015. Pp. vi, 388. ISBN 978-0-674-59847-8.

Review by Michael R. Dolski, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (michael.r.dolski.civ@mail.mil).

Masuda Hajimu's *Cold War Crucible*<sup>1</sup> provides a rare combination of clear writing, coherent argumentation, and impressive scholarship. It goes beyond a probing transnational analysis of the Korean War era to push the boundaries of diplomatic and military history in exciting new directions. Building on the solid work of other historians,<sup>2</sup> the author links domestic affairs and foreign diplomacy to elucidate national and international tensions and social pressures both from the top down and the bottom up.

Masuda (Univ. of Singapore) defines his book as “an attempt to rewrite the formation of the Cold War through synthesizing social and diplomatic history and local and global history” (2). In particular, he believes the Cold War “existed not because it was there but because people *thought* that it existed. It was, in this way, an imagined reality that came to be shared and solidified in the postwar era, particularly during the Korean War, which many feared was the beginning of World War III” (2). While this would seem to be well traveled terrain, the author follows some rather unexpected pathways.

The analytical anchor here is the Korean War seen as the crucible of the Cold War. Masuda casts it as a transnational phenomenon in which societies not merely reacted to the emergent Cold War, but actually created it as a new form of global confrontation. He illuminates the collective responses to the new, post-World War II order in societies as different as China, Japan, Korea, the United States, Great Britain, and the Philippines. But he also situates them in a global context of the immediate legacies of the recent war. Admittedly, the gulf between the experience and the outcome of that war for countries like China and the United States profoundly affected their citizens' confrontation with the changing postwar world (27-33, 41-45, 70-86). But the outbreak of the Korean War, as Masuda shows—in great detail—prompted startlingly similar reactions, including the suppressing of dissent and enforcing of conformity at home, as well as the demonization of other powers in an increasingly rigid Cold War divide; these, in turn, promoted widespread fear of a hot war.

The book comprises three sections. The first concerns the post-World War II period from 1945 to 1950, when societies became battlefields in the struggle to recover from destructive and disorienting wartime experiences: “in such chaotic circumstances, with visible divisions and conflicts, it is not difficult to imagine the emergence of new phenomena and emotions” (23). The forces of social change collided with conservative elements bent on reinforcing the status quo by suppressing dissent. Of course, differences between countries appeared, as the conceptual groundwork was created for a hostile global environment of “us” vs. “them.” The United States adjusted to its roles as a global power and the object of global threats, while the Japanese strove to rebuild and the Chinese fell into another vicious cycle of internecine warfare.

The book's second section addresses the outbreak of the Korean War and transnational responses to it. China, the United States, the two Koreas, and Japan feared the conflict on the Korean Peninsula might be token the start of a Third World War. Masuda, calling this a “history of the *fantasy* of the Cold War,” seeks to “delineate how such an imagined reality, fueled by fear, antagonism, memories of war, and concerns about disorder at home, eventually *became* the irrefutable actuality of the postwar era” (2).

To give a sense of the book's analytical scope, Masuda argues convincingly that, but for the Korean War, the foundational American Cold War document, National Security Council Report 68, “would have

1. Originally, “Whispering Gallery: War and Society during the Korean Conflict and the Social Constitution of the Cold War, 1945-1953” (diss., Cornell, 2012).

2. E.g., William Steuck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1995).

gone nowhere” (112). NSC-68 outlined a major militarization of US efforts to contain the Soviet Union, a change then made possible by official and popular anxieties over the war in Korea.

Throughout this section and the third one (focused on domestic reactions), Masuda is at pains to show that many local conflicts, often instigated and directed from below rather than entirely by elites, were a key element of the nascent Cold War order. Thus, anti-labor backlashes in the United States coincided with anti-colonial and anti-Japanese sentiments in what later became North Korea, all under the guise of a confrontation with the “other” across the ideological divide. “[T]racing the social construction of a fantasy of the Cold War world reveals that the actual divides of the Cold War existed not necessarily between Eastern and Western camps but within each society, with each, in turn, requiring the perpetuation of the imagined reality of the Cold War to restore and maintain order and harmony at home” (8).

Masuda’s comprehensive and generally cogent analysis of societies at a liminal moment between quasi-peace and perpetual twilight war is based on prodigious research work conducted in fifty-eight archives around the world (371). The result is a vivid evocation of the thoughts of real people of all social strata. For instance, in one place Masuda writes of the outbreak of the Korean War from the perspective of Koreans trapped in Seoul during the initial June 1950 attack by North Korean forces. Showing the mixed loyalties and blended identities of these individuals provides keen insights into the civilian experience of this war (59–60).

Masuda also offers critical commentary on the history profession, especially the impact of over-specialization as scholars restrict their research to exclusively bounded zones of interest (17), for example, China’s civil war or American conservatism in the early Cold War era. He believes—and demonstrates—that careful consideration of interlocking domestic and foreign, transnational, diplomatic, military, and cultural factors yields a far more nuanced assessment of how and why societies reacted to events like the Korean War as they did. Thus Masuda’s intriguing assessment of Sen. Robert A. Taft (R-OH) maintains that “his international view was not based on studying international relations or local situations in foreign countries; his domestic views simply extended to the global arena. In short, Taft’s tough stance had more to do with electoral campaign tactics than with strategic and military considerations” (98). This sensible characterization of a leading American political figure reflects Masuda’s conviction that “oppositional voices were becoming less and less audible in the fall of 1950” (106). In effect, domestic affairs melded with the international angst over the new war in Korea seemed to portend a cataclysmic Third World War and produced a demand for conformity, consensus, and stability in facing foes both internal and external.

All in all, the author’s methodological argument against over-specialization is well taken, if difficult to put into practice. Few historians can master the daunting array of material required for such a political-military-cultural analysis. Even Masuda’s wonderfully researched and persuasively argued book has some lapses. For instance, in a work purportedly on the Korean War as a key transitional moment in world history, there is very little discussion of the war itself. And, too, there is a disproportionate emphasis on its first year (1950–51). This even though 1952–53 saw major developments in the potential use of nuclear weaponry, allegations of US biological warfare efforts, seemingly ceaseless armistice negotiations, fears and uncertainty over POWs, and many other matters pertinent to the domestic-international stresses at the heart of Masuda’s analysis.

Perhaps these are the grumblings of an unrepentant military historian, but the response of societies to the Korea War surely changed in reaction to events *on the battlefield*. Indeed, when Masuda does delve into military affairs proper, he shows himself to be a discerning and convincing analyst in this field as well. His outstanding treatment of the Inchon amphibious landings of September 1950, where UN forces reversed the tide of war (temporarily), astutely dismantles the standard tale of great success in a bold operational gamble. He clarifies the pressures behind the operation, its intended results, actual gains, and unexpected consequences—topics often passed over in English-language discussions of the motives for Chinese intervention in the war (104, 121).

Breadth of coverage also leads to some oversimplification. Specifically, Masuda underrates the extent of Soviet-Chinese cooperation in military assistance, training, and provisioning for air and anti-air forces (160–

64). This may be due at least in part to his general exclusion of the USSR from the book.<sup>3</sup> Still, it is unfair to fault a work for being at the same time too broad and not quite broad enough. The omission of a separate bibliography, however, perhaps a space-saving measure, will frustrate students and scholars seeking to recreate the research.

Despite these minor reservations, readers will learn much from Masuda Hajimu's excellent, innovative, thought-provoking study of both the Korean War and the early evolution of a new global order. The book successfully illuminates the grand narrative topic of the Cold War with many vibrant stories about diverse people struggling to adapt to the perilous world in which they lived.

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3. See further Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (NY: Norton, 2013).