

Book Review: Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World by Masuda Hajimu

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Hajimu, Masuda. *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. viii + 388 pages. Hardcover, \$39.95.

When did the Cold War begin? Who started it? These are two of the most studied questions in the research on the Cold War, and yet their answers have not been settled by historians. Traditional scholarship on the Cold War has paid attention to the beginning of the undeclared political and ideological conflict between the United Soviet Socialist Republic and the United States, the world's two most powerful nations post World War II. These studies point to a range of possible birthdates for the conflict including the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the early post-war order circa 1945. Newer trends, however, have shifted historians' focus from the origin of the war and the two superpowers, to the domestic historical contingencies in other countries and regions. Indeed, historians such as Odd Westad and Heonik Kwon provide a fresh framework for Cold War studies by examining the origins and course of Third World revolutions. In *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*, based on his dissertation research, social historian Masuda Hajimu revisits the question concerning the origin of the Cold War from both a global and local perspective, and challenges previous conceptions about the 'reality' of the conflict.

In his book, Hajimu argues that the Korean War was a catalyst for the Cold War. The innovation in Hajimu's argument is that it does not presuppose the existence of the Cold War order; on the contrary, the book asserts that the reality of the Cold War finds its origin in a fiction, from the myths and emotionally charged reactions of everyday people. Thousands of people in the lower levels of society, particularly in countries heavily hit by the fire of World War II and those involved in the Korean War, were fearful of potential enemies and a world-wide nuclear war. In addition, parallel to—and nurtured by—this social trend, the political and diplomatic conflict unfolded. Indeed, Hajimu also sees the origin of the Cold War as a reflection of a strong social (not necessarily political) conservatism that was a backlash to the progressive agenda of the years of World War II, for example, the incorporation of women into the workforce and the opening to protest movements in occupied Japan. Within the so-called Capitalist Bloc these backlashes adopted the label of 'anti-communism'; in the Soviet Union and China, the conservative movement took advantage of the 'anti-American imperialism' campaigns to achieve social conservatism.

Hajimu presents an incremental picture of the Cold War. It did not appear overnight; rather, the Cold War was an idea that snowballed. The book is structured in such a way that it conveys this sense of gradualism and acceleration. The first part takes a close look at Chinese, Japanese, and American societies during the period of 1945 till 1950. The author picks a series of specific episodes in each of these nations to show the influence of people's fear and anxieties in high level policy-making. The second part of the book concentrates on the outbreak and the first months of the Korean War. The war in the Korean peninsula resembled a miniature World War (nationals of over twenty countries were engaged in combat) and thus to many people it

seemed to be a preamble to an even bigger confrontation. The argument that local, social pressure shaped the view of the Cold War in Washington and Beijing is further elaborated here. The last part of the book analyses the purges in the early 1950s as a result of the conservative backlash in several societies. Studying China, the United States, Japan, England, the Philippines, and Taiwan, part three provides evidence for the argument that the divide of the Cold War existed within each society. Hajimu explains that “the perpetual position of the imagined reality of the Cold War...restored and maintained order and harmony at home” (p. 8).

Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World is an important book that shines a new lens on the Cold War and its origins. It shows how ordinary people were not passive actors but, to a great extent, were the initiators of the conflict. Moreover, by providing case studies of several different countries, it trespasses the thick borders of individual, nation-based social histories. In short, this well written book challenges many long-held views of the Cold War and provides a significant methodological contribution to the disciplines of political science and history.

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