three factors: first, by its rapidly shrinking power in world affairs; second, by the eventual eclipse of the first generation of post-independence leaders (such as Nehru and Ayub Khan) who, as McGarr rightly points out, "were, for better or worse, products of the British colonial system" (p. 348); and, third, by Washington's growing regional role between 1955 and 1965 – a role that further "contributed to the erosion of residual British influence in the region" (p. 347). In the end, however, when all is said and done, one wonders whether American and British interests in South Asia could not have been best served by a more detached Anglo-American attitude. McGarr clearly inclines towards this conclusion. He is probably right: after all, how much better were Moscow and Beijing likely to fare in their attempts to befriend the two quarrelsome giants of South Asia?

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**Cold War crucible: the Korean conflict and the postwar world**, by Masuda Hajimu, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2015, 400 pp., $US39.95 (hardback)

According to this book, the Cold War was a "bipolar confrontation ... widely accepted as a substantial, irrefutable actuality" (p. 1); it was "different from other wars" (p. 2); it was "discourse", a "reality" and a "constructed reality" (p. 3, p. 4). It was *not*, at least not solely, a "single, global conflict that divided the world in two, between the Eastern and Western camps" (p. 5); nor was it a "single, global confrontation, shaped through the conduct of elite policymakers and experienced in the same way across the world" (p. 6). This juxtaposition of positive and negative definitions establishes *Cold War Crucible*'s main motif and central problematic: even if traditional understandings of the Cold War are partly right, they are empirically insufficient, and so only through further empirical research can we understand "what the Cold War truly was" (p. 9).

So the Cold War was an "imagined reality ... solidified in the early postwar era, particularly during the Korean War" (p. 2). This reality was initially created in response to "social need" – not of policymakers and of intellectuals, but of "numerous" and "ordinary" people (p. 2, p. 4), who craved order above all, and utilised the "logic of East–West confrontation" (p. 7) to attain this order. Their behaviour was largely created not by the Cold War itself, but by experiences of social change leading up to the late 1940s and early 1950s. Inhabitants of the United States, Japan, China, Canada, Korea, Britain, Taiwan and the Philippines wanted little more than good and peaceful lives. The Korean War, however, foreclosed these opportunities. In response, the majority of these societies, both frustrated by the prolongation of wartime austerity and yet still hopeful for social stability, turned their inchoate energies on dissidents and the disorderly: communists and leftists, striking workers, opponents of racism, advocates of gender equality, and the underdeveloped and unhygienic. A binary and fundamentally agonistic Cold War logic ("us versus them") coupled with repressive social policies stimulated these many, ordinary individuals to marginalise, persecute, inform on and press for the execution of those who could be most easily blamed for the perceived lack of normalcy in everyday life. Thus, Masuda Hajimu argues, what created the Cold War "at home [and] on a global scale" was the combination of social frustration, prior experiences of World War II and widespread acceptance, and internalisation, of categories derived from a new geopolitical confrontation and corresponding set of social policies: "a gigantic social construction of an imagined reality" (p. 286).

*Cold War Crucible* pursues this argument across a time period stretching from 1946 to 1952. The first section explores the role played by local agency, and frustrations, in carrying forward agendas more frequently associated with high politics: anti-communism, Japan's Reverse Course and anti-Americanism. In the second section, the author argues that social forces emboldened by Cold War rhetoric became political forces in their own right, pushing governments toward confrontation with one another and their own populations. The final section demonstrates that "domestic purges" (p. 277) and "social warfare" (p. 278) occurring on both sides of the ideological divide were manifestations of the same underlying phenomena: prewar social dynamics, imagined Cold War "realities" and state-sanctioned policies of domestic repression.

Contrary to what its subtitle suggests, the book is not about the Korean Conflict, and most chapters do not engage with that subject much at all. Rather, it is a fine contribution to the growing subfield of what might be called "early Cold War social history": scholarship which, by treating the late 1940s and early 1950s as a single period, decentres elite-centred Cold War narratives by bringing them into dialogue with grassroots experience, legacies of prior decades and the dynamics of intermediate zones which, like Asia, existed between the superpowers' core territorial regions. Nevertheless, its relentless argument that the Cold War amounted to a socially imagined and constructed "reality" (a word encrusted with scare quotes throughout), while provocative, may not appeal to all readers. It provides scant evidence to suggest that social imaginaries alone pushed the observable events of the period forward. The historiographical strategy of treating "the center of power, not as the *origin*, but a *part* of social and cultural events" (p. 277) seems to rely on referring to elite politics only when they appear vulnerable to grassroots challenges. Nor does the emphasis on discourse and imagination explain how even local events unfolded as they did. Even on the ground, fantasies of order created real instances of persecution and terror. While Masuda acknowledges such outcomes, it is somewhat reductive to explain them as logical outcomes of some mutually imagined need. (An example: "even if it entailed the killing of tens of thousands of people, and however cruel it was, [China's] *Zhenfan* movement did provide a sort of 'order' to an unprecedented degree through the purification of society and settlement of social confusion and conflicts", p. 256.) By sidelining political leaders and focusing instead on popular forces in the aggregate, *Cold War Crucible* suggests that the period's historical reputation for social repression was both richly deserved and primarily attributable to local self-interest, prejudice and groupthink.

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## JAPAN

**Precarious Japan**, by Anne Allison, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2013, 256 pp., US$23.95 (paperback)

In *Precarious Japan*, anthropologist Anne Allison paints an evocative picture of poverty and insecurity in contemporary Japan. In Chapter 2 she traces the growth in precariousness to the "liquidisation" (*ryūdōka*) of what she calls the "family-based production model" following the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990s. This model, she argues, drove economic growth and ensured social stability in the boom years of the postwar from the mid-1950s