

**Heonik Kwon.** *The Other Cold War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. xi + 211 pp. \$50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-52670-8.

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In this work, Heonik Kwon argues for a new interpretation of the Cold War. Kwon objects to how the Cold War is often interpreted as a confrontation between superpowers that resulted in minimal deaths and destruction. Kwon argues that no single definition can codify how a nation, society, or even village experienced the Cold War. A form of peace may have existed during the Cold War for some nations, such as the United States, but other nations experienced significant upheaval, violence, and even death at a massive level. The division of the world into communist and anticommunist camps created ruptures that were not only visible at the national level but also at the local level. For Kwon, truly understanding the Cold War requires going beyond the superpower confrontation of the threat of nuclear annihilation to examining the local level and understanding the disruptions caused in the daily lives of people both during the Cold War and in the years after.

Kwon approaches his study of the Cold War from an anthropological background rather than a more common historical or military perspective. While this does provide a fascinating and different interpretation of the Cold War, often it is difficult to comprehend Kwon's ideas. The author provides several examples of anthropological scholarship to establish his arguments and, at times,

refute the ideas of others regarding the Cold War. Yet, his scholarship is so thorough and complex that it becomes difficult to understand his approach or even the ideas of the scholars he is citing. Furthermore, Kwon does not provide enough background information to understand the arguments of other scholars before he starts to agree or disagree with them. Thus, it is easy for the reader to get lost in the Kwon's construct of scholarly work, unless the reader is already familiar with the works mentioned. For students of anthropology, Kwon's approach is probably easy to navigate but for students of history or other disciplines, his scholarly structure may prove difficult to understand or, at least, too problematic to fully appreciate the arguments presented.

Another difficulty in Kwon's writing is his attempt to strengthen his arguments with as many scholarly adjectives and terms as possible. While summing up some of his ideas, Kwon writes "in this light, I have so far critically assessed modalities of cultural globalization and postsocialist social transition, which I argued adopt a mystified notion of the global" (p. 58). Kwon seems to be packing his sentences with as much academic punch as possible; yet, he weighs down his sentences with so much information that it becomes difficult to understand what he is trying to argue. At times, Kwon does do a masterful job of sum-

ming up his ideas and clearly explaining not only what he has argued but where he is about to take the reader. Even so, these guideposts are not enough to prevent the reader from becoming frustrated and wearied with his writing style.

A major strength of Kwon's work is how he uses personal experiences to show how divisive and painful the Cold War was and still is for some. His depictions of how people on Jeju Island, South Korea, and Danang, Vietnam, wrestle with the legacy of having family members on both the losing and winning sides of the communist vs. anti-communist fight, helps to personalize the Cold War in ways that often get lost in the larger narrative of superpower conflict. Kwon shows how the commitment to honor one's ancestors in these areas sometimes comes into conflict with how the state wants to portray its heroes in the conflict for or against communism. Kwon wonderfully depicts the struggles people endured in order to erect both personal and public shrines toward those on the "wrong" side of the conflict. As insightful as these examples are, Kwon's work would have benefited from having even more examples of personal anguish and struggle in dealing with the legacies of the Cold War.

Kwon's argument that the Cold War experience is more varied and violent than many studies emphasize is a valid one. Especially from the American perspective, the Cold War often is portrayed as a war that did not happen. In reality, violence ensued between communist and anticommunist forces in Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and myriad other places, with Americans sometime getting embroiled in the conflict. Kwon's focus on the local experience of the Cold War is a valuable contribution to the scholarship of Cold War studies and helps readers to better connect with the violent upheaval that the Cold War created in the lives of many in the world. Yet, Kwon's near impenetrable prose makes it difficult for readers to appreciate his arguments and evaluate his conclusions.

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[1]. Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 58.

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