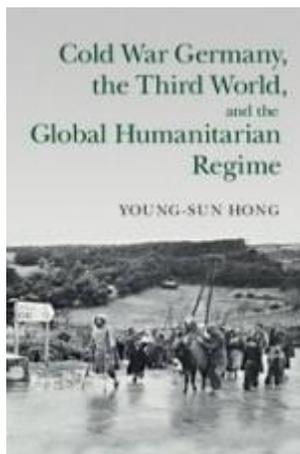


# Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime

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Young-Sun Hong's *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* explores the history of Northern and Southern Germany's post-1945 relationship by way of their respective health and development policies. This lens captures levels of analysis that cannot be made visible through typical Cold War centered perspectives. Telling the story of what Hong calls the "global humanitarian regime" allows the reader to break free from the classic Cold War paradigm focused on superpower politics, in which all aid to the South was manipulated by Moscow and Washington, subordinated to the quest for world domination. In Hong's account, both the United States and the Soviet Union stay in the background, whereas the main characters are German aid workers and the recipients of their medical aid.

Although immersed in the Cold War setting, the global humanitarian regime is not just a product of bipolar logic. Rather, it constitutes a bridge between Northern and Southern Germany as well as dimensions concerning East and West. After 1945, traditional asymmetries, which had been constructed in the age of imperialism and colonial mandates, were rearticulated across the new East-West divide. This emerges plainly from Hong's narrative, which often hints at important continuities. The global humanitarian regime, she claims, was grounded in notions of racial and civilizational difference, which were articulated most clearly in relation to public health, hygiene, and human rights. Her analysis conducted through the case of the two Germanies allows the reader to spot these continuities, especially as far as the hard-line notion of racial difference is concerned. The necessity of coming to terms with uncomfortable legacies and the redefinition of identity connected with Cold War ideology are also important elements of this picture.

Far from telling a new political history of Germany's Cold War, Hong provides a cultural history of developmental failures, East and West. Her study is organized through a selection of case studies, all from the Cold War and the development decade par excellence, 1955-1965. It starts with an introductory chapter which discusses a broad set of issues. First, the introduction deals with the imperial origins of international humanitarian law. It then shows how the imperial genes of international law have structured the promotion of public health as a way to diffuse a Western model of civilization in the late 1940s. Finally, it describes the Soviet counteroffensive in the 1950's, thus sketching the Cold War and postcolonial framework in which the 'story' of Cold War Germany and public health takes place. A second, much broader section, deals with case studies. The first is Korea, which is articulated into two parts: East German aid to North Korea and West German medical aid to South Korea. The second is Indochina, more specifically medical aid to Vietnam, with an emphasis on the East German experience. The following chapter deals with national liberation movements, especially East German aid to the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) and to the Congo. The focus then goes west, with a slightly more conventional study of how the Hallstein Doctrine affected aid to Africa, wherein the author tends to overshadow the pressures of the United States by suggesting that West German aid was mainly a reaction to East German activism. The next chapter moves back to Asia and offers a very interesting study of West German recruitment of nurses, and the final chapter is devoted to the best known case of inter-German competition for influence in Africa: the case of Tanzania.

Hong does not write a conventional Cold War history of humanitarian assistance. She is, rather, interested in discussing the persistence of cultural frameworks shared by the East and the West alike. These were a legacy of the imperial past and were based on explicit ideas of racial superiority. Although this is especially true for West Germany, even East German failures in understanding Africans were deeply connected with inherent cultural and racial prejudice. A special kind of East German Orientalism is effectively portrayed through the characters of Bethmann and Kirsch, two East German medical doctors working in Vietnam. On the whole, the picture offered in the book is fairly black and white. The author clearly takes sides with the Socialist countries: East Germans are the good guys – their policies are sometimes naïve or ill conceived, but even if not exempt from racist prejudice, they are benevolent and enthusiastic. While Socialist solidarity appears to be well meant but poorly carried out, Western humanitarianism seems to be built on ideas of security, militarization, and anticommunism that radically undermine the whole concept of humanitarianism. West Germany is the epitome of the wicked donor. Nazi doctors are disguised under the cleansing cloth of the German Red Cross. Humanitarian action in Pusan, South Korea, is a story of sexual abuse, malpractice, and public scandal. Whether in Korea or in Algeria, West German doctors are portrayed as a group of drunk, violent, and sexually licentious men while presenting themselves as victims of unbearable situations who are trying to face barbarity and preserve an island of civilization. At the same time, these same medical personnel staunchly oppose Christian charity and criticize the work of American colleagues. This representation seems exaggerated. It is certainly much grimmer than the picture of the bad guys in Burdick and Lederer's *Ugly American*, which constitutes a sort of blueprint for the narration of Hong's story. Unlike the 1958 political novel, however, here the Socialists make mistakes. Typical of these are health exhibitions, where the great distance between East German culture and the sensitiveness of the recipients never fail to cause problems.

Well-written and charming, the book is highly enjoyable and an outstanding piece of research. The author skilfully connects disparate episodes and convincingly turns them into chapters of a consistent narrative. The impressive array of archival sources, especially on the German Democratic Republic side, complemented by interviews with some of the protagonists and fascinating photographs makes of *Cold*

*War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* an invaluable work for understanding the cultural history of development.

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