

Minor Salvage

The Korean War and Korean American Life Writings

The Korean War, often invoked in American culture as “the forgotten war,” was fought between 1950 and 1953 and ended with an infamous stalemate and the construction of the Korean Peninsula’s Demilitarized Zone. Millions of Korean civilians and refugees were left behind, some of whom would go onto live in the United States. *Minor Salvage* reads early Korean American life writing in order to explore the admittedly partial ways in which those made precarious by war seek to rebuild their lives. The titular phrase “minor salvage,” draws on different valences of the word salvage which, while associated with naval recovery efforts, can also be used to describe the rescue of waste material. Sohn enacts minor salvage by reading early Korean American life writings penned by Induk Pakk, Taiwon Koh, Joseph Anthony, and Kim Yong-ik alongside a more contemporary generation of life writings authored by Sunny Che and K. Connie Kang. In the context of the Korean War, Sohn argues, life writings take on a crucial political orientation precisely because of the precariousness attached to civilians and other associated figures. To depict the possibility of life is to acknowledge simultaneously the threat of death, violence, and brutality, and in this regard, such life writings are part of a longer genealogy in which marginalized communities find representational power through the creative process.

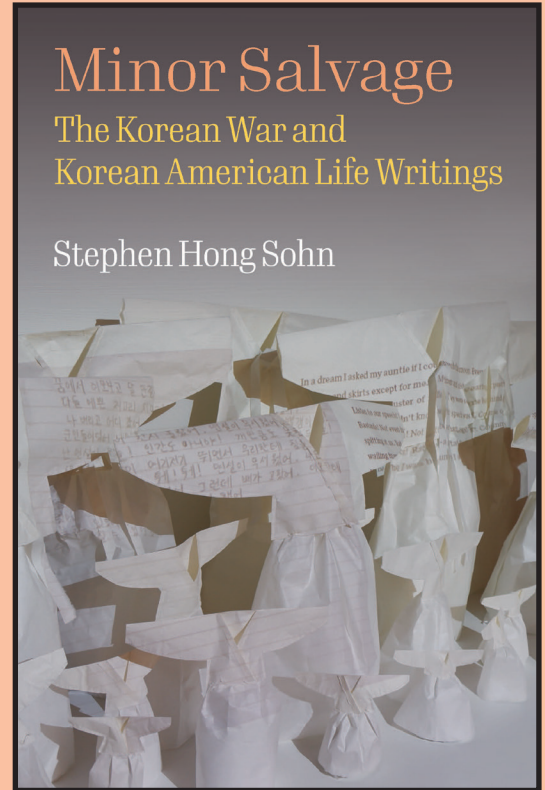
Stephen Hong Sohn is Thomas F.X. and Theresa Mullarkey Chair in Literary Studies at Fordham University.

“Sohn’s *Minor Salvage* is rigorously conceptualized and beautifully wrought. It is an important contribution to existing studies of the Korean War and to a broader degree, American studies of US empire, literary criticism, and memory studies.”

—Crystal Mun-Hye Baik, University of California—Riverside

“Through his astute and thoughtful analysis of life writings by Korean American survivors of the Korean War, Sohn offers both an important archival recovery and a critical reading practice that centers our understanding of the war on lived experiences of civilians. *Minor Salvage* is a vital contribution that fundamentally refutes the Korean War as ‘forgotten.’”

—Caroline H. Yang, author of *The Peculiar Afterlife of Slavery: The Chinese Worker and the Minstrel Form*



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Stephen Hong Sohn

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