



## **The Korean War's Three Afterlives: *Hypothetical Post-Liberation History, Korean Cold War Refugees, and an Excavation of Hidden Voices in Korean-American Literature***

*A Fractured Liberation: Korea Under U.S. Occupation.* By Kornel Chang. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2025.

*Minor Salvage: The Korean War and Korean American Life Writings.* By Stephen Hong Sohn. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2025.

“Northern Refugees and the Rise of Cold War Nationalism in South Korea, 1945–1950.” By Yumi Moon. In *Cold War Refugees: Connected Histories of Displacement and Migration Across Postcolonial Asia*, edited by Yumi Moon, 74–109. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2025.

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Ever since the publication of Bruce Cumings' *The Origins of the Korean War* (1981, 1990), there have been many interesting interpretations and approaches to the study of the Korean War. The past two decades has seen several original attempts to understand the origins and the nature of that war. These have included analyses of the role of American public opinion in the US decision to enter the Korean War (Casey 2008), the grief and terror experienced by Korean civilians before and during the conflict (Hwang 2016), the international and diplomatic dimensions of American interrogation rooms during the war (Kim 2019), and the origins of the April Third Massacre and its connections to the South Korean Workers' Party and the ideological foundations of North Korea (Jo 2024). Despite topical differences, what binds these aforementioned works together is their common interest in connecting specific domestic and international conditions that either shaped the contour of the war or enhanced the general understanding of the war's aftermath.

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However, what remained critically missing from these narratives were the consideration of how the postcolonial moment in the war's history could have been written differently if the American military government had chosen nationalists to reconstruct south Korea and an examination of how Korean War refugees and the choices they made compared with those from other Asian countries. Moreover, there is still a glaring neglect of how Korean Americans who escaped the ravages of war to establish new lives remembered and related their pasts and presents through fiction and non-fiction. Collectively, these novel approaches would allow readers to appreciate the importance of the American military government in the history of postcolonial Korea and to understand how civilians and non-combatants suffered the most and yet were neglected because the overall structure of the Korean War as a contest between anticommunism and communism has all but silenced their voices.

Regarding the latter point, focusing on the Korean War's aftermath from the perspective of global refugee history, specifically Korean Americans and the lives they tried to build by escaping the war, allows readers to understand the gravity of not just the war but its psychological consequences in a more relative light. However, despite the originality of such approaches, several problems limit their methodological appeal. First, while studying the American military government in south Korea does shed light on postcolonial Korea, Kornel Chang's hypothetical considerations about what might have happened if the American military government had not hired pro-Japanese collaborators, but instead listened to middle-of-the-road politicians such as Lyuh Woon-hyung, are fundamentally ahistorical, for while the actual facts that form the basis for such hypothetical conjectures are undoubtedly accurate, there are simply no credible pieces of evidence to support the veracity of the hypotheses themselves. The ahistorical framing of these hypotheses ultimately diminishes the potential originality of the facts revealed about postcolonial Korea, because the facts are not treated historically but only for what they suggest about the nature of the Korean War.

Second, regarding Yumi Moon's attempt to place the Korean War's aftermath within the context of global refugee history, while that attempt in

itself allows readers to comparatively understand the politics of the war, using the label “refugee history” as a veneer to pardon violent anticommunist groups such as the Northwestern Youth Association (or Northwest Youth Corps) is not only highly inappropriate but a grave injustice to those who were killed in cold blood at the hands of such groups simply because they were incorrectly suspected of being communists. If such groups must be understood as refugees and be cast in a tragic light, what must be said of, for example, the thousands of villagers and fishermen killed indiscriminately by the Korean National Police under the same incorrect assumption they were all followers of the South Korean Workers’ Party? Using the lens of refugee history to criticize the so-called “Revisionist school” of the Korean War only illustrates the plain fact that the intent behind Moon’s use of refugee history to study the Korean War is not so much to highlight the Northwestern Youth Association as to paint *liberal* scholars such as Bruce Cumings in the worst light possible.

Finally, while Stephen Sohn’s attempt to highlight Korean-American voices through a study of literary works certainly does reveal previously unknown social dimensions of the Korean War, there is simply no clear answer to how these aspects complement the overarching focus on the nature of the war itself. Other than revealing previously neglected voices, the method simply lacks the rhetorical power to erase or replace the original focus on the nature of the war. This is precisely because there is no clear answer to exactly what is replaced or corrected in the war-centered studies through a study of Korean-American literature or life writings. More specifically, because there is no clear justification for focusing exclusively on Koreans who escaped to America, and because most of these escapes occurred after rather than before the Korean War, the book’s intent to provide a corrective to war-centered narratives is ultimately less compelling than its original premise would suggest.

Historian Kornel Chang’s *A Fractured Liberation* (2025) examines the policies of the American military government in Korea and the politics in south Korea that informed, or misinformed, American decisions. Chang’s principal motives for writing the book are to examine turning points in the American military government’s decision-making process that might have

prevented the division of the Korean Peninsula and to show that the division of the peninsula was the fault neither of the Right nor the Left in Korea, but due largely to the misunderstandings and incorrect choices the Americans had and made in Korea. Chang's work aims to show how the American military government viewed the volatile situation in post-liberation Korea, highlighting the legacies of Japanese colonialism on post-liberation politics and the intense Left-Right struggles to define the political character of the Korean Peninsula. In the first chapter, Chang highlights how Koreans from the Right and Left tried to carve out Korea's destiny with their own hands, with moderates such as Lyuh Woon-hyung establishing the Korean People's Republic, aiming to unite the Left and the Right in a single, unified coalition, and extreme Left-wing groups holding people's courts and trials to punish former pro-Japanese collaborators (Chang 2025, 11–34).

However, as Chang's second chapter illustrates, the unity between the Left and Right quickly gave way to hidden ideological fractures, as farmers tried to win back lands wrongly confiscated during the colonial period, workers in urban areas demanded better wages and treatment, and intellectuals and politicians on the Left especially debated fiercely whether a top-down bureaucracy was appropriate for communism or socialism. Unfortunately, the Allies had different designs on the Korean Peninsula that extended beyond Koreans' knowledge or control (Chang 2025, 35–55). As chapter 3 demonstrates, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin disagreed over whether 40 or 5 years of political tutelage was best for Korea. Roosevelt, reflecting a colonial mindset, argued Koreans were unfit for self-government, whereas Stalin viewed a rapid settlement and withdrawal of all foreign forces from the peninsula as a pragmatic compromise that could help the Soviet Union avoid direct conflict with the United States. As the Allies bickered amongst themselves about Korea's future, as chapter 4 demonstrates, Americans in Korea struggled to understand the country's political landscape. General John R. Hodge, the head of the American military government, could not easily abandon his commitment to anticommunism and engaged former pro-Japanese collaborators to oversee administrative duties while refusing to cede managerial control to workers, who were deeply unsatisfied with the continuation of the colonial situation

in which landlords and capitalists dominated factories and industrial plants (Chang 2025, 56–86). Toward peasants, the American military government instituted restrictions on rent charged to tenants, which protected some peasants, but for many who thought they had won back their fair share of land from the Japanese, reappropriation of lands by the American military government constituted a loss (Chang 2025, 84).

To make matters worse, it was impossible for the Allies to come to a firm agreement about a single issue. Although the Joint Commission began negotiations between the Americans and the Soviets in the hope of settling on a compromise, they were unable to agree on the terms of their mutual withdrawal or the duration of the trusteeship, which left Koreans restless and annoyed about the delayed prospect of independence. This restlessness exploded in the form of uprisings, most notably in Daegu and on Jeju, which not only produced much chaos, confusion, and bloodshed, but more importantly, signaled the emergence of separate regimes. Despite attempts to set up a Left-Right coalition, Left and Right-wing groups could not come to any clear agreement. Syngman Rhee was busy mobilizing supporters to rally against the Moscow Agreement, while Kim Kyu-sik and Lyuh Woon-hyung were constantly threatened by the Right by assassination attempts and anticommunist rallies (Chang 2025, 110–153). Right-wing activists did not hesitate to turn to extortion by allying with gangsters such as Kim Tuhan, and the political turmoil did not end until Lyuh was assassinated by a young Right-wing agitator on Rotary Road in Seoul. Thus came to an end middle-of-the-road politics (Chang 2025, 143, 151).

By May 1947 the Joint Commission was dead, with Americans and Soviets eyeing each other with deep suspicion, each believing the other was trying to neutralize its influence. When the Americans eventually introduced the Korean question before the UN General Assembly, the outcome shifted toward the proposal of general elections. However, Syngman Rhee ardently supported the idea of separate elections in south Korea, planning to expel Hodge from Korea. Hodge, for his part, wished to find a replacement for Rhee, while pushing forward with separate elections should the Soviets refuse to cooperate. Furthermore, by 1950, the American military government instituted a Janus-faced land reform program: it

promised the redistribution of around a quarter of all farmland to peasants, while simultaneously allowing rich landlords to purchase former Japanese-held properties at reduced prices. The rich landlords were able to convert these lands into bases for future conglomerates such as Samsung and LG, which would play a significant role in South Korea's subsequent economic growth.

With the death of the Joint Commission secure, Syngman Rhee moved quickly to ensure that separate elections in south Korea would guarantee the establishment of a south Korean government. Despite vehement criticism from north Korea that the holding of separate elections was an American plot and the continued insurgency on Jeju (which did not end until 1954), Rhee vetoed virtually all attempts to oppose the completion of a south Korean constitution, and by 1948, the founding of South Korea, with enthusiastic American endorsement, was complete. Chang ends his book by concluding that had the American military government approved the Left-Right alliance, a genuine middle-of-the-road politics would have firmly taken root in Korea, a prospect that ended with Lyuh's assassination. Chang also argues that it was Hodge's deep-seated anticommunism that inspired him to concentrate on maintaining the status quo rather than introducing radical changes. The American-Soviet disagreement about who ought to assume the majority in south Korea—the Right or Left—never found a definitive conclusion, and while the division of the Korean Peninsula was not inevitable, the division was not a choice for Koreans to make, since it was a direct product of great power politics (Chang 2025, 169–211).

With its extensive use of official documents, Chang's account is informative, and his decision to connect the colonial period with postcolonial Korea is a wise one, showing not only the colonial origins of the Korean War, but also the intricate entanglements and disagreements that intensified Left-Right conflict in Korea. Chang is especially meticulous in his discussion of American political thinking towards Korea and the tensions that led to the Joint Commission's failure. Furthermore, by ensuring that the overall narrative leads up to the 21st century, he does not forget to remind readers how timely his subject matter is in tightly connecting the past with the present. However, there are some fundamental problems with

his methodology and the way he represents Lyuh Woon-hyung and Syngman Rhee. Regarding the former, Chang's decision to rely on novels and literary works to analyze the colonial period, while understandable given the scarcity of reliable sources, is ahistorical and somewhat distracting (Chang 2025, 15–17). Compared with the post-1945 topics, his analyses of novels, while succeeding in making their points about the plight of the peasants and their struggles with landlords, have no basis in any historical facts. The contrast with the rich foundation of primary sources he uses for the American side makes this shortcoming more glaring. It would have been better had he introduced statistical data to illustrate the same point he makes with his literary analysis, for even if such data might make his writing dry, it would surely have been more accurate and informative. In addition, although his engagement with hypothetical questions, such as what might have happened had Hodge endorsed the Left-Right coalition, is understandable, it is also ahistorical because such hypotheses can never be verified through historical sources. Moreover, since the discussion prior to these counterfactuals focuses primarily on factual analysis, it becomes unclear whether the book's main objective is about getting the facts right or using the facts to illustrate the value of the hypotheses.

Another problem with *A Fractured Liberation* is that because Chang concentrates on telling the American perspective and proving that the division of Korea was not inevitable, his portrayal of Lyuh Woon-hyung is largely inaccurate, while he has a rather excessively positive view of Syngman Rhee. Chang utilizes Bruce Cumings' judgment of Lyuh's character and argues that Lyuh was not very clear about his political program and faults the nebulous nature of his stance as a main reason for his downfall. But Chang makes no effort to understand the actual content of Lyuh's philosophy. He does not analyze the nature of Lyuh's centrist ideology, which was radical for the 1940s because Lyuh actually envisioned a Korean version of Swedish social democracy. More specifically, Chang does not analyze *Yeo Unhyeong-eul malhanda* (Discussing Lyuh Woon-hyung), which contains the most authoritative collection of Lyuh's speeches and writings (Lee et al. 2007). Nor does Chang consult Lee Ki-hyung's 2004 biography of Lyuh, which mentions Lyuh's philosophical poem "Juja yugaekmun" (Zhuxi's Joke

for a Visitor) (Chang 2025, 212–218; Lee 2004). Had Chang consulted these sources, Lyuh Woon-hyung would have emerged as a more progressive and radical thinker than the confused and disorganized individual that Chang depicts. If Chang consulted these sources, he would have been able to provide a more nuanced portrait of Lyuh; since Chang does not provide one, his initial judgment of Lyuh being awkward and out of sync with his times does not square well with Chang's sympathetic hypothetical remark that had Hodge listened to Lyuh, the latter's vision would have been kept alive (Chang 2025, 151).

However, more problematic is Chang's judgment of Syngman Rhee. While Chang acknowledges Rhee's authoritarian handling of the process behind confirming separate elections for south Korea, Chang's arguments that Rhee was a "true believer" or that Rhee "did not profit" from his presidency are not only inaccurate but deeply offensive to those who fought against Rhee's dictatorship (Chang 2025, 211). If Chang can accurately acknowledge that Rhee was authoritarian in his push to ensure the appearance of a separate regime in south Korea, how can the same man be a "true believer?" Chang does not delve extensively into Rhee's American years as one historian has in a recent biography of Rhee (Fields 2019), so without this, there is no evidence in Chang's book to suggest that Rhee was a "true believer" in anything aside from the anticommunism that held his dictatorship together. Given that Chang already acknowledged the tensions between Kim Koo and Rhee and the fact that Lyuh Woon-hyung and all members of the extreme Left did not like Rhee, there was no harmony or camaraderie between Rhee and the Korean Provisional Government to suggest that his "true belief" materialized into a concrete vision (Chang 2025, 211).

Moreover, when an individual establishes a dictatorship by going so far as to employ gangsters and the National Police to massacre innocent fishermen wrongly suspected of being communists, it is difficult not to conclude that Rhee was driven by a desire to monopolize power. Until April 1960, Rhee remained the unchallenged dictator of South Korea, so it makes no sense to argue that Rhee did not profit from his presidency. Rhee did immense damage to South Korea's democracy, and the multitude of

innocent citizens who died resisting his dictatorship would vehemently disagree with Chang's attempt to condone Rhee.

Yumi Moon, an historian at Stanford University, complements the war-centered scholarship on the Korean War by examining and placing Korean War refugees in a global context (Moon 2025). In her edited volume, she has assembled specialists of Southeast Asia, East Asia, and South Asia to tell contested stories of displacement during the Cold War and to show how the meeting of decolonization and ideological tensions between communism and anticommunism created complex situations and meanings for various peoples across Asia. Examining diverse groups of refugees relocated after the 1954 Geneva Convention, Dachen refugees who relocated from Zhejiang to Taiwan following the First Taiwan Straits Crisis, North Korean refugees in South Korea before and during the Korean War, and Afghan refugees in Karachi, Pakistan, Moon's edited volume examines the interplay of ideology and refugees as political actors, the relationship between ethnic categories and the governance of political space, and the complex entanglement of postcolonial and Cold War politics. *Cold War Refugees* highlights not only the transnational character of refugee movements, particularly in the aftermath of the Korean War and the First Indochina War, but also the crucial role artificial borders played in dividing previously unified nations and ethnic identities. These divisions were deepened by intense ideological conflict and the ensuing confusion (Moon 2025, 1–4). Finally, the volume highlights the agency of the refugee groups themselves, the suffering and the turmoil they had to endure as they unexpectedly witnessed their once united and peaceful homelands divided and occupied by foreign powers and were made subject to decisions not of their own making (Moon 2025, 4–5).

Moon's volume is notable for its diverse use of archival sources, from official government documents, personal interviews, and multi-archival research, demonstrating a genuinely international scope of coverage for a global refugee history project. It also uncovers previously unknown social histories of major political events, such as the First Indochina War, the Korean War, and the First Taiwan Straits Crisis. Despite its introductory nature and its reliance primarily on American documents, the volume offers a good introduction to refugee history and its place within both global

history and Cold War historiography.

However, despite the volume's positive intentions and ambitions, Moon's chapter, which is the main focus in this essay, is unfortunately less concerned with highlighting refugee history during the Korean War than with advancing an anti-revisionist polemic under the veneer of discussing North Korean refugees in South Korea during the Korean War. While it is true that "despite the large number of northern [Korean] migrants during this period [1945–1950], their history has been relatively unknown" (75), Moon uses this observation to justify a focus on the notoriously violent and anticommunist Northwestern Youth Association. While her essay discusses the complexity of American categories for north Korean refugees ranging from "war refugees" to "people who crossed the border," and specifically documents the north Korean refugees' diverse backgrounds (from peasants to landlords and Christians) and the hardships they experienced under Soviet occupation, Moon is too soft towards the north Korean anticommunists, crediting them wrongly for changing the dynamics of Korean nationalism while making no mention of the violence they unleashed toward innocent civilians and peasants who had been misled by the South Korean Workers' Party to support the party's cause (Moon 2025, 100).

Moreover, while Moon speculates about the reasons behind the Northwestern Youth Association's turn to violence, none of these explanations can morally justify or excuse their actions. Whether this choice to engage in violence was out of an urge to escape poverty, a struggle for power within the Northwestern Youth Association, or because most of these activists had been exposed to a culture glorifying militarism or violence, the real issue is that their reckless and indiscriminate violence toward south Korean civilians wrongly suspected of being communists can never be pardoned or understood in a positive light. What the Northwestern Youth Association did in South Korea was undeniably a crime, and the reasons Moon provides comes across as a means of pardoning or excusing those crimes. What makes Moon's positive portrayal of the Northwestern Youth Association most problematic is that it appears only meant to counter Bruce Cumings' so-called *revisionist* account of an *indigenous revolution*, which is

itself used to explain Korea's postcolonial history (Moon 2025, 108). Moon attributes the principal cause of the Northwestern Youth Association's violence to the North Korean revolution and argues that placing blame solely on the US and the Soviet Union is problematic (Moon 2025, 104). The more important issue, however, is that the violence unleashed by the Northwestern Youth Association cannot be pardoned, regardless of its immediate cause.

Even if it were true that the North Korean revolution inspired the violence of the Northwestern Youth Association, the argument still fails to explain why responsibility should be attributed to north Korea rather than to the Soviet Union during their occupation of the north. Furthermore, because the political objective behind the violence was to counter the North Korean revolution itself, it makes little sense to blame north Korea for the Northwestern Youth Association's campaign of violence, which was specifically intended to halt the very political movement the organization had already witnessed in the north. It was south Korea's condoning of anticommunist violence which enabled the Northwestern Youth Association to think that they too could partake in the same kind of violence. Leaving aside the question of whether south Korean or north Korean politics were more responsible, it is undeniable that south Korea's anticommunist violence during the late 1940s directly inspired the Northwestern Youth Association to behave in the violent ways that it did. Finally, because Bruce Cumings already documented and commented extensively about the origins of the Northwestern Youth Association and their political agenda in the second volume of his *The Origins of the Korean War*, Moon's critique not only does not subvert Cumings' narrative, but ironically supports it, because despite her sympathetic tone towards the Northwestern Youth Association, she too does not deny the violence of that organization.

Stephen Sohn's *Minor Salvage* (2025) offers a radical departure from much of the mainstream scholarship on the Korean War, including the two books examined above, by analyzing Korean-American literature about the Korean War and the lives of Korean Americans following that war. Sohn argues that much of the scholarly discussion about the Korean War published in English tends to focus on the origins and progression of the

war, such that the war's cultural history and the Korean diaspora to America and its literary output during and after the war years have been largely ignored. Sohn organizes his study around five themes in order to examine the philosophy and literary styles of Korean-American authors writing about their experiences during and after the Korean War: proximate memory, seeking refuge in America as a gift, authorial revision, "critical refutopias," and retrospective transformations.

The opening chapter explores how shortages of resources, shelter, along with the need to protect family members, helps readers understand and empathize with refugees during the Korean War, thereby offering a critical counterpoint to the prevailing view of refugees as obstacles and liabilities (Sohn 2025, 23–61). In chapter 2, Sohn examines the life writings of Induhk Pak and Taiwon Koh and argues that the transnational experience of immigrating to the United States represented a gift for Korean-Americans trying to flee the ravages of war and reunite with family members. These life writings depict the turmoil of humanitarian crises and developmental dilemmas caused by war, offering readers a window through which to examine these social problems (Sohn 2025, 62–103). Chapter 3 examines the autobiographical writings of Joseph Anthony, a playwright and a Korean-American refugee from the Korean War, and critically analyzes the dissonance and distance created between popular media portrayals of Anthony's work and the actual writings themselves. Against the mainstream perception of the United States' involvement in the Korean War as a morally justifiable and humanitarian enterprise, Sohn examines the challenges Anthony confronted in rewriting multiple versions of his life narrative to demonstrate how the facts of a person's life can differ from those reconstructed for popular consumption (Sohn 2025, 104–141).

In chapter 4, Sohn analyzes Kim Yong-ik's fictional life writings, especially *The Shoes from Yang San Valley*, a novella adapted from his short story, "The Wedding Shoes." Sohn critically examines how individuals and entities are transformed and reconfigured through adaptation, such as by resurrecting dead characters or attributing magical qualities to inanimate objects. Through such adaptive changes, in both content and form, the author is able to create what Sohn calls a "critical refutopia"—an idealized

time and place where a refugee is able to create something of meaning and possibility despite desperate and hopeless circumstances (Sohn 2025, 142–180).

The final chapter examines retrospective transformations in the writings of K. Connie Kang and Sunny Che, showing how critical shifts in narrative perspective, figurative language, and verb tense convey the desperation and hardships experienced by refugees. Through such transformations, these authors also offer pointed critiques of American military culture and the South Korean government's policies and attitudes during the Korean War (Sohn 2025, 181–221).

While Sohn effectively highlights the diversity of voices and perspectives in Korean-American literature, and demonstrates how different stylistic techniques enabled authors to pursue their distinct aims, his work ultimately does little to supplement or displace the traditional military-centered framing of the Korean War, in terms of discussing that war's origins, progression, and conclusion. Although Sohn compellingly illustrates the hardships Korean Americans experienced while fleeing the war, the narratives and life writings he presents largely serve to establish a new genre rather than reshape historical debates. Certainly, it is important to understand how radically Korean-American lives were transformed by this terrible war. However, it remains unclear whether such personal and literary transformations are sufficient to reorient the historical debate on the origins of the Korean War, on whether studying the civil war phase is "revisionist," or whether the domestic and international phases of the war ought to be connected or considered as separate and distinct phases. While Sohn's sub-topics are interesting, the overarching argumentative rationale for examining Korean-American literature written during and after the Korean War remains weak. Beyond drawing attention to non-military aspects of the war that scholars such as Bruce Cumings and other more recent scholars of the Korean War may have overlooked, the book offers little additional contribution.

In short, while the idea of examining Korean-American literature on the Korean War and its aftermath is innovative, that innovation alone is not sufficient to persuade readers that studying this particular topic will allow

for a transcendence over the prevailing debate on the nature and origins of the Korean War. Two main issues help explain why Korean-American literary treatments of the Korean War have been relatively neglected. First, these works rarely engage in depth with the causes or character of the Korean War itself and thus do not provide a clear conceptual framework for understanding what the authors are escaping from. Second, it is not immediately evident to a reader, Korean or otherwise, why Korean-American life writings on the war should be treated as inherently more significant than Korean literature on the same subject. Indeed, non-Korean scholars have yet to undertake a sustained critical engagement with Korean-language literary treatments of the Korean War on a large scale. In short, the reasons Sohn identifies as gaps in the literature on the Korean War are not necessarily gaps and the neglect of Korean-American literature on the war may be less a problem than a symptom of a larger neglect of literary works on the Korean War produced in Korean.

Kornel Chang, Yumi Moon, and Stephen Sohn have each published works that broaden the range of issues for future scholars of the Korean War to ardently examine and debate. Chang's examination of the American military government's policies and their impact on postcolonial Korea sheds much light on the political intrigues and confusion that characterized south Korean politics during the late 1940s. Moon's chapter, and the larger edited volume of which it forms a part, allow for a more global comprehension of the Korean War as a problem within inter-Asian refugee history. Sohn's study of Korean-American literary writings sheds much light on the struggles and challenges that Korean-American writers faced as they left Korea in the hopeful search for new opportunities in the United States.

However, because Chang does not adequately analyze Lyuh Woon-hyung's centrist philosophy using Lyuh's own writings and is somewhat problematically apologetic about Syngman Rhee, a critical reappraisal of postcolonial Korea is necessary from these two aspects. In addition, Moon's failure to resist the temptation to use her chapter as a platform for inaccurately criticizing Bruce Cumings for a supposedly inadequate portrayal of the Northwestern Youth Association is, in this reviewer's view, a reminder that the so-called revisionist position is still poorly understood.

Finally, Sohn's examination of Korean-American literary and life writings about the Korean War and its aftermath, while notable in analyzing diverse complex aspects of Korean-American experiences after the Korean War, is somewhat grandiose about its academic purpose and intentions. While his study does open a new venue of research and does much to shed light on much-neglected voices in the existing English-language historiography of the Korean War, it goes too far to claim that examining this aspect helps readers transcend the war-centered narrative of English-language scholarship on the Korean War. Enduring questions about the origins and nature of the war, along with its contested legacies, will continue to shape future academic debates, and Sohn's work can be a part of that ongoing discussion. However, it remains unclear whether Sohn's account offers a genuinely new paradigm, since the issues raised in this review themselves call for extensive further and research and reflection.

There is no shortage of material on the Korean War to explore for those able to consult the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland or the National Central Library in Seoul. What can be said with certainty is that these three books have opened up important questions to which their authors have posited intriguing possible answers, but their arguments still require further refinement in terms of accuracy and analytical precision.

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