Introduction

National identity and millennials in Northeast Asia

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The relationship between youth and politics is a much-debated issue around the world. In Europe, the young are often considered as generally disengaged, even depoliticised. In O'Toole et al. for example, young people – that is, individuals aged 18 to 24 – are said to be rather apathetic, less concerned with politics, less informed about public affairs and reluctant to exercise their civic responsibilities (O'Toole et al. 2003; see also Pilkington & Pollock 2015). As a result, the issue of youth political disengagement is recognised as a major challenge for contemporary democracies (Kitanova 2020). In contrast, other scholars have highlighted that today's young people are still politically active, but in new ways. Their mobilisation calls on other registers, notably via online forms of participation that use the Internet, social networks and other digital technology (Coleman 2005 Kann et al. 2007; critical views on this point in Banaji & Buckingham 2010, Keating & Melis 2017). Unpacking these novel forms of non-institutionalised youth political engagement activities is thus seen as a central challenge facing most contemporary regimes (Norris 2004). A last group of scholars has framed contemporary political engagement and disengagement among the young rather as occurring *simultaneously*. This in turn has some scholars calling for new means of framing a paradoxical 'radical unpolitical model' associated with both the new concerns and practices that characterise today's young people across most market economies (Farthing 2010).

Moreover, in recent decades and across much of Asia, a strong national state presence is generally seen as having a stifling effect on the development of youth political engagement (Lam-Knott & Cheng 2020). This is seen as particularly true – but not only – in the specific case of the many non-democratic regimes on the Asian continent[1] where governments limit young people's independent political engagement by youths, while seeking to control and to mobilise them for their own benefit through mass organizations in particular (see the role of the Communist Youth League in China in Tsimonis 2021; the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union in Vietnam in Valentin 2007; the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League in North Korea; and for Cambodia, see Norén-Nilsson 2021). Elsewhere, studies of East Asian youth participation in electoral politics in the 1990s and 2000s (Tambe 2016), and surveys

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exploring the political sentiments of contemporary Malaysian youth (Voon 2018), for example, have found that given the strong national state presence, young people feel alienated from political affairs and are therefore reluctant to engage on these issues (Lam-Knott & Cheng 2020). However, recent events across the region show that such findings describing a depoliticised or apathetic Asian youth are to be qualified. During the 2010s and 2020s, significant and sustained youth political activism and mobilisation have been observed across Asia (Joo 2018). Young people in Asia have mobilised on numerous occasions and on various issues. For example, in 2014 in Taiwan they opposed a pending free trade agreement with the People's Republic of China (PRC) that was perceived to jeopardise Taiwanese sovereignty (Rowen 2015). This 'Sunflower Movement' attracted widespread public attention and support. It helped bring about a change of government in early 2016 and triggered a wave of activism that has since continued to reshape Taiwanese politics (Ho 2019). In Hong Kong, too, youth – of which the '1997 Generation' played a major role (Au 2020, 37ff.) – engaged in the 'Umbrella Movement' in 2014, which called for 'genuine universal suffrage'[2] (Veg 2015). This movement paralysed the city for several weeks before dying out. But some of its young leaders went on to found new political parties, and Hong Kong continued to be agitated in subsequent years by various forms of activism, mobilisation and political protest in which youth played a prominent role. This was the case during the Mong Kok 'Fishball Riot' on Chinese New Year's Day in February 2016 (Kwong 2016), an event described as the worst street violence in Hong Kong since the 1966 and 1967 riots (Dapiran 2017). The latest example of this youth activism in Hong Kong was the massive protest movement against the Anti-Extradition Amendment Bill/Anti-ELAB in 2019 and 2020 (Holbig 2020, Ku 2020, Ibrahim & Lam 2020). It has mobilised a large section of Hong Kong's youth against the authorities. According to Au Loong-Yu, more than half of the protesters in the major demonstrations in the summer of 2019 were indeed under 29 years old (Au 2020, 38).

Recent examples of contemporary youth activism in Asia do not only come from the 'Chinese world'. In Japan, the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 proved a catalyst with many young adults mobilised through various civil actions (e.g., demonstrations, petitions, creation of collectives). It also led to the growing involvement of young people in discussions around nuclear development (Gonon 2018). Another recent example in Japan, between May 2015 and August 2016, is the Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALD), a student-led movement mobilised against the security laws proposed by late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (Rowen 2018). A wave of activism also emerged among South Korean youth as early as 2002 fuelled by the spread of the Internet (Kang 2016). Youth mobilisation would flourish over the following years, included the so-called 'Candlelight Vigil' in 2016 and 2017 that led to the removal of President Park Geun-hye. In Malaysia, Syed Saddiq became the country's youngest minister in 2016 (at the age of 24) and founded the United Democratic Alliance of Malaysia (MUDA) in 2020,

officially registered as a political party in December 2021. Young people – notably through the Free Youth Movement (FYM), which aimed for large-scale political and social change in the country – were also prominent in the pro-democracy protests that rocked Thailand in 2020 and 2021 (Phoborisut 2020; Lertchoosakul 2021; McCargo 2021; Thanapornsangsuth & Anamwathana 2022). In Myanmar, young people (aged 18–35) also mobilised against the military coup of February 2021 and were at the forefront of the civil disobedience movement against that country's military junta (Su 2021). In Asia, youth political activism has even taken a transnational turn through the 'Milk Tea Alliance', a pan-Asian online democratic solidarity movement composed of netizens from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Myanmar, but also to a lesser extent from the Philippines, South Korea, Japan and India (Ponglamjiak 2021; Schaffar & Praphakorn 2021; Dedman & Lai 2021, Huang & Svetanant 2023). These are but a few examples of the wide scope and diversity of youth political mobilisation in Asia over the past decades.

This book seeks to examine recent trends to better understand how the young in Northeast Asia engage with the political, notably when it comes to the production, reformulation, or contestation of national identities. For this book, youth is understood as the cohorts born between the 1980s and the early 2000s who are often referred to as 'Generation Y' or millennials. The overview suggested by the various contributions in this volume will show that the young and their forms of engagement in Northeast Asia are primarily social constructions linked to regional socio-economic and cultural contexts. This has resulted across Northeast Asia in a generation of young people that is far from being a homogeneous or essential whole.

Despite this observed and clearly stated diversity, the clear geographic focus on the Northeast Asian region – including Taiwan, China, the two Koreas and Japan – helps to anchor the book's exploration of youth political engagement in a specific context characterised by interdependent dynamics. The chosen region has a strong internal dynamic and is of global importance as it has become an essential centre of gravity not only in the field of international relations and the economy, but also in socio-cultural terms. South Korea, Japan and China, for example, compete in terms of historical memory (in relation to Japan's colonial history and imperialism, in particular) and cultural influence (from J-pop to K-pop, and more recently to the C-pop that is sweeping the Chinese world). The resulting interactions and competition have produced transnational flows that challenge Northeast Asian societies, inviting them to revisit and rethink their national identities. The mobilisations and political participation of Northeast Asian youth are part of the complex context in which these states and societies are confronted with massive transformations – whether demographic, economic, technological or cultural. It is in this dynamic context that national identities are being transformed and challenged by Northeast Asian millennials as they deal with both the ebb of socio-economic certainties and flow of increasingly emotional debates around notions of history, belonging, memory and national pride.

Younger generations in China, Taiwan, Japan and both Koreas are playing an increasingly important role in shaping these debates, notably via the Internet and social networks (Wu 2007; Yang & Zheng 2012; Liu 2019; Han 2019; Lepesant 2018; Lee 2006; Kang 2016; Honda 2007). While states were quick to recognise the potential of the Internet to disseminate and project a powerful nationalist message to their populations and the rest of the world (see for example the case of the PRC in Schneider 2018), the Internet has also opened new channels and avenues for younger generations to express their nationalism or to speak out on issues of national identity. Contrary to the facile idea that the Internet has made people more cosmopolitan, its widespread adoption has led to neither the disappearance nor even the relative dwindling of considerations of national identity. To the contrary, as Eriksen points out, national identity has been 'reincorporated', allowing it in some cases to even flourish online (Eriksen 2007, 7). This 'reincorporation' is alternatively referred to as online nationalism, digital nationalism, cyber-nationalism, user-generated nationalism or Internet nationalism (Ahmad 2022). Mainly used by the younger generations, the digital world has thus become a new territory where national identities are reinterpreted and transformed. The young in Northeast Asia have invested the digital space at the same time as states and political representatives across the region have made it a major tool for the dissemination and construction of ever-prevalent official discourses on national identity. One of the aims of this collective work is to explore the intersection between national identity formation and digital spaces as critical sites in the construction of collective identities and the shaping of political cultures among the youth.

Ultimately, besides the specific study of the online spaces where Northeast Asian millennials engage with current debates surrounding their respective national identities, the edited volume also seeks to unpack the distinctive forms of expression and negotiation of national identities favoured by younger generations across Northeast Asia. These two objectives are reflected in the book's two distinct sections, with the first five chapters focusing on 'Youth culture and national identity in the digital era', and the latter five unpacking 'Political activism, civic engagement and national identity'.

Outline of the book

The first section seeks to tackle a set of questions on how Northeast Asian millennials acting online inscribe themselves in, against or beyond official or dominant national discourses. Through the study of a set of symptomatic empirical cases from across the region, each of the first section's chapters unpacks specific cultural products and practices associated with popular youth culture across the region. Collectively these first five chapters will seek to answer a range of questions, including: What spaces for negotiation do the young enjoy online? What are the relationships between digital youth culture

and either state or non-state institutions? And what kind of digital instruments do they have at their disposal?

The book's first chapter, on 'Heroes and Villains of *The Word of Honor*: Co-optation of popular culture in promotion of "core values" and patriotism in the PRC' by Kamila Hladíková, explores the specific case of the BL *xianxia* web drama *The Word of Honor*. Notwithstanding the seemingly niche nature of web-based homoerotic fantasy storytelling, the author convincingly shows how this product of pop culture, produced by and for Chinese young people, is also shaped by wider hegemonic power dynamics that constrain mobilization and identity formation across all aspects of the Chinese polity. The chapter's chosen critical Gramscian lens captures and describes the hegemonic dynamics embedded in Chinese cultural production through which both state and market powers have successfully prompted the young to both internalise and reproduce the dominant discourses on national identity. The subsequent chapter by Kendra Sheehan on 'Soft power, globalization, and the otaku: Influencing Japanese nationalism from within and abroad' shifts the empirical focus to online identity formation through cultural commentary on pop culture by the young in Japan. Contrary to the previous case, the context described is a democratic one, although one characterised by prevalent social control and a forceful national narrative. The chapter shows how the development of online communication shifted understandings of 'otaku' identity and impacted global views of Japan. It notably describes how otaku and popular youth culture have popularised nationalist consciousness, while recognising the ambiguous relationship otaku culture entertains with nationalism and wider Japanese society. Similarly, in ' "Battle for Peace" in a "cosmopolitan China": Negotiating a national cultural identity and cross-boundary connections in the online TV show *Street Dance of China Season 4*' Peng Lei also highlights the opportunities new media offer young people to negotiate the fraught and often contradictory relationship between youth culture and state imperatives, and this even in non-democratic politics. The chapter teases out the complexities and contradictions involved in the representation of a 'cosmopolitan China' through the making of a specific popular cultural product: street dance. Yet the limits – both external and internalised – to such digital spaces where Chinese millennials might re-examine and express their identities beyond the national state discourse are described in the 'The sense of place: Chinese K-pop fans' nationalist sentiment performance on social media' by Bin Zhou. The chapter's textual analysis of Chinese K-pop fan forums shows the emotional anguish and ideational dissonance that come with the enforced reconciliation of youth identity and state discourse. The final chapter of this initial section is empirically the most exploratory one as it investigates the prospects of the digital in the most repressive and reclusive regime in the region. Bernhard Seliger and Cho You-Jin discuss the development of a unique North Korean youth culture as an interaction of state control and new freedom of the so-called generation of market participants.

This final chapter on 'Youth culture in the Hermit Kingdom: National propaganda, proto-digitalization and the fight against dangerous foreign influences' confirms that across the region – China, Japan and both Koreas – the digital has become a privileged space of youth identity formation, including notably those spaces dedicated to popular (youth) culture that are dominated by the young themselves. In all cases studied here, the relationship to the political and market powers that are structuring variables for the young – as producers, commentators or consumers – of the digital cultural product cannot be ignored. How that relationship to the hegemonic power structures plays out is therefore a key differentiating factor in the experience of Northeast Asian youth when it comes to national identity formation online.

Building on the insight of the first five chapters, the second section of the book hones the questions specifically raised by political mobilisation by the young across Northeast Asia. With this in mind, the gathered chapters consider which mechanisms young people across the region have deployed when engaging politically with the main societal issues that preoccupy them. How has their public mobilisation for a given cause forced them to rethink their place in their national community as well as the world? In this respect, the different contributions focus on the young but purposefully consider online as well as more traditional spaces of political mobilisations. While the focus of the book remains on digital spaces, this relative broadening allows it to also explore the interactions between 'physical' and 'online' receptacles of young people's national and political identities in South Korea, China, Taiwan and Japan.

The chapter by Yi hyun Kang and Amandine Orsini on 'A multi-level analysis of youth climate activism in South Korea' explores one of the most widespread forms of political activism among global youth: environmental and climate activism. The network analysis and international political economy of South Korean youth mobilisation on climate provided by the chapter repositions mobilisation in this Northeast Asian country in its global context. Challenging national – and nationalist – discourses, the chapter show how young generations in South Korea are adopting environmentalism as part of their identity and using the digital space to connect within as well as beyond national borders. Alessandro Albana for his part explores 'Young political activists in the Xi Jinping era: The Jasic struggle and the prospects for social mobilization in China' and shows the specificities shaping the contemporary Chinese expression of a traditional form of youth activism: student activism. Through a detailed process-tracing and sociology of the Jasic struggle he argues that despite – or possibly because of – the new means of connection and mobilisation the digital space has allowed for, contemporary youth in China must deal with forms of state repression that have been driven to new heights. Both in-person and digital mobilisation by the young are doused as the Chinese regime has seemingly broken with the unspoken repression–concession balance that arose in 1989. Whether online or in person, the chapter shows that even when in line with the values of the state, young Chinese people face both discursive

and physical violence when engaging with contentious politics. The subsequent two chapters explore youth political engagement in Japan, an advanced market economy and mature liberal democracy seemingly suffering from a textbook case of the disengagement and depoliticisation described by O'Toole. Nonetheless, both chapters identify new forms of political expression by (and for) Japanese young people that have arisen in the wake of new technologies, be it anonymous online video platforms or ubiquitous video game culture. In 'Moderating hate on the Internet in Japan: the anonymous campaign against Japanese right-wing hate speech' Jeffrey Hall argues that the anonymity online activism allows for has significant advantages for youth participants who wish to avoid becoming the targets of societal retaliation or harassment. While recognizing that online activism has allowed for individual Japanese young people to engage politically, often for the first time, the author also questions the relative efficacy of such activism in reaching its stated goal of countering right-wing content creators. Similarly, Víctor Navarro-Remesal in 'Caricatures, corruption, and antisocial forces: The representation and enactment of youth and politics in Japanese video games' also sees indirect political mobilisation for and by the young in Japan in its videogame culture (*gēmu*). While games rarely portray politicians as significant characters, they have become a medium generally consumed by the youth that regularly reflects politics in the country. As such, in both studied cases in Japan, new technologies have become constitutive platforms that have contributed to raising the political consciousness of the young, but in an indirect way removed from the formal national political debates. Finally, Karen Huang in '"The PRC words have infiltrated our language!": Taiwanese national identity and linguistic purism' explores another form of roundabout political mobilisation young Taiwanese engage in online when seeking to engage with the explosive issue of Taiwan's relationship with the mainland. It describes how online linguistic debates between young Taiwanese can be considered a grassroots online movement that raises awareness of the Chinese influence.

Key findings on technology, culture and national identity among youth in Northeast Asia

The various chapters of this book point to the younger generations as producers and consumers of cultural products that are part of both sides of the ongoing dialectic between transnational flows open to innovation, discovery and adaptation, on the one hand; and dynamics fleshing out, exploring and exploiting distinctive national traits, on the other. Two apparently opposite trends feed into a singular movement: openness to different influences and diversity, but also the reformulation of imported cultural forms to adapt to national conditions and sensibilities. In this sense, it is understandable that national identity has not indeed disappeared in the digital age, nor has the cultural integrity of nations been challenged by the deterritorialised nature of the Internet (Eriksen 2007).

In the virtual spaces, akin to what happens in the physical world, expressions and even affirmations of national identity can take on structural features that are aggressive and exclusionary. In the studied Northeast Asian cases, this is notably the case in anti-Korean far-right discourse in Japan (see Chapter 8 by Hall); in the violent attacks on Chinese K-pop fans accused by some of their nationalist compatriots of being unpatriotic (see Chapter 4 by Zhou); or in the violent criticism and subsequent radical erasure from the Internet of young Chinese idols guilty of being insensitive to the memory of the Sino-Japanese war (see Chapter 1 by Hladíková). Then again, in other situations described in the book, more contextual and popular expressions of nationalism emerge. For example, in the pitting of Chinese and international dancers against each other to reinforce a "Chinese national style" (see Chapter 3 by Peng) or the capitalisation on an "otaku culture" unique to Japan (see Chapter 2 by Sheehan). As a result, forms of state nationalism (directed and encouraged by the authorities) and popular nationalism (fuelled by individuals) coexist.

The actors shaping national identities in popular youth cultures are therefore multiple, as the contributions in this book show. First, the omnipresence of the state in the construction of a national identity cannot be ignored. States across Northeast Asia mobilise and exploit youth cultural capital for their own political and economic benefit. The general observation across the region is thats of a convergence of interests between the state and large companies (or a 'double cultural hegemony' as argued by Hladikova). Both see in youth cultures opportunities to increase a profitable soft power to enlarge either their zones of influence (Chapter 3, Peng; Chapter 2, Sheehan) or profits. Youth cultures are thus places to develop a style inspired by international trends but reframed in a national manner that is legible and exportable as such. State intervention then consists of encouraging a globalised and open development of youth cultures geared towards maintaining a positive image of the nation. This outward focus on fostering a positive national narrative explains why the Cool Japan programme – which aims to optimise Japan's image internationally through its popular culture (manga, anime) – has promoted a roughly positive image of otaku, despite otaku being considered by Japanese society as misfits fleeing into virtual worlds (see Chapter 2, Sheehan). Mutatis mutandis, hip hop, street dance or 'fan culture' are tolerated in China insofar as they contribute towards a 'positive energy' (Chapter 3, Peng; Chapter 4, Zhou). This is understood as a general impulse to create a favourable climate for receiving and disseminating state ideology and socialist values within cultural productions by and for young people. The implicit contract between state, funders and producers or consumers is thus no longer (or not only) based on coercion, but on consensus and harmonisation of relations.

As a result, the subversive character of certain cultural universes – be they for example those associated with otaku or street dancers – is erased. These cultural products and practices are brought into conformity with state and economic interests, resulting in controlled spaces where young people can 'safely' explore and express their relationship to the nation. The control exerted by the

state (or the market) can be more or less severe, and thus more or less stifling. In Japan, while some otaku are assimilated to extreme right-wing movements, others deride and distance themselves from a predetermined 'Japaneseness'. Indeed, not all young Japanese otaku or netizens feel the performative need to represent the Japanese nation according to the preferences of the Japanese state (see Chapter 2, Sheehan). *A Contrario*, in a Chinese context where the classic devices of authoritarianism are in place, the lines between what is allowed or tolerated and what is not are both blurred and arbitrary. Additionally, the recent political atmosphere of ideological tightening by the Chinese regime has further contributed to an ever more severe repressive environment. The extreme case of the totalitarian North Korean regime is even further down the authoritarian end of the spectrum, since importing South Korean films or music is sometimes tolerated, and sometimes renders individuals liable to be sent to a camp or even sentenced to death. Navigating the grey areas is therefore immeasurably risky in North Korea, leaving young people with very little space for expression and action outside of official institutions and ideology (see Chapter 5, Seliger and Cho). The Internet for young people across Northeast Asia has thus become a paradoxical space where top-down control is both reasserted and destabilised.

Despite these contradictory pressures, a strong interdependence still enmeshes the different actors shaping Northeast Asian youth cultures. While these interdependencies echo across the different chapters, not all authors share the same perspective on the spaces of agency shaping these interdependencies. Peng in his chapter argues that for example street dance demonstrations, while under the control of the state and major economic actors, can still constitute a 'third space' in which the relationship to both the nation and culture can be explored and (re)negotiated. Less optimistically, Zhou's and Hladíková's findings show how the permanent control of K-pop fans and their idols' activities forces their cultural productions to become declaratorily depoliticised and substantively highly politicised as censorship and self-censorship confine cultural productions to consensual or low-risk (safe) content. Yet in all cases cultural production by the young is constitutively subject to the political influence of the moment. Importantly, cultural products can serve multiple functions, but first and foremost in Northeast Asia they function as platforms of normalisation and socialisation for young people.

In seeking to shape such wider processes of normalisation and socialisation, state authorities and market actors in Northeast Asia can rely on an informal army of young patriots who flush out and condemn rebellious elements and enforce the accepted national norms, even before the state needs to (see Chapter 1, Hladíková; Chapter 4, Zhou). By identifying with 'normalised' or consensual idols, fans form an interactive and participatory community that can be mobilised and manipulated by cultural industries and political regimes alike. Zhou shows this transfer of the emotional relationship to K-pop stars to the place of origin or the nation as the primary place of belonging, which leads to radical displays of patriotism. The cases of otaku in Japan as well as

K-pop and homoerotic romance fans in China differ in so far as they offer the distinctive example of such socialisation relatively bereft of full-blown normalisation, as they are limited to a very specific fan community that exists in the margins of the wider national society. In these cases, the cultural products and online spaces become refuges for alternative identity-building and collective re-examination of the national. Even in North Korea, it is impossible to predict the evolution of the relationship between young fans of South Korean popular culture and the state. Seliger and Cho show us in Chapter 5 that, in a North Korea where foreign series are distributed under the cloak of USB keys with codes, all possibilities remain open, from near total repression to a timid but irreversible opening. Notwithstanding this range of possible outcomes, there are several signs that the non-democratic powers in Northeast Asia are tending towards a hardening, as several seized on the opportunity of the pandemic to further tighten their grip.

It should however be remembered that youths remain diverse, fragmented, non-uniform, and that this apparent fluidity of belonging (cultural, community, ethnic, national) is also a strategy for navigating complex systems that require constant adaptation to changing red lines. This fluidity is a characteristic more readily identified in the more directly political forms of mobilisation described in the second part of the book. The involvement of young people in environmental or social causes is in fact marked by a variable temporality, constant permutations from one collective or organisation to another, fluctuating membership and, above all, a mistrust of existing institutions, whether linked to the state or not (Chapter 6, Kang and Orsini). This fluidity, far from being a sign of casualness or disengagement, allows for greater independence and flexibility in the relationship between the individual and both state and market institutions. It also facilitates transversal, even international alliances, by moving away from a certain essentialism of national issues and taking a more universal and transnational perspective. Finally, it responds to a general context throughout the region under study: an ageing population and political classes, and the political under-representation of young people in the context of a ‘senior regime’. Such ‘Silver democracy’ – to borrow the term used by the Japanese – leads to a radical distancing of young people, who refuse to identify with the political class and make it the object of parodies and absurd characters, notably in video games (see Chapter 9, Navarro-Remesal). When and where possible, this is equally true to varying degrees for most Northeast Asian states. Similarly for example, young South Koreans active in environmental advocacy explicitly reject overly formal links with institutions linked to state power that represent the interests of older populations (see Chapter 6, Kang and Orsini). Instead, they more readily identify with transnational causes, allying themselves with other youth organisations around the world. National identity in these cases is less of a concern than generational and cosmopolitan signifiers of identity. In China, the dissonance is of a different nature. If students leave their campuses to join the workers’ protests around the large factory complexes, it is out of conviction and Marxist commitment, which

might seem in line with the ideology put forward by the leadership. Far from questioning the regime in place, these young people have internalised the idea of a communist nation and seek to articulate their understanding of this shared national ideal. However, under Xi Jinping, there is patience neither for rallies of any kind, nor for concessions (see Chapter 7, Albana). The former 'red princes' (children of the pioneers of the Chinese socialist revolution) who have risen to steer the country do not see these protesting purple youths in a good light. As a result, such in-person youth mobilisations, although Marxist in inspiration, have led to arrests and disappearances of young demonstrators. In sum, the varied forms of youth activism across Northeast Asia take place in a context of ageing societies that are not very youth-friendly and are still reluctant to listen to their concerns, which can feed anything from benign neglect to violent repression by the state.

Nevertheless, this more or less hostile environment across Northeast Asia has not prevented mobilisation, be it online or offline, as millennials have explored new forms of engagement and found refuge in deliberately marginalised or neglected subjects that do not necessarily interest the national political class. This is the case in Japan and Taiwan. In the former, the anonymity online mobilisation against the extreme right wing proved the catalyst for a wider youth movement denouncing YouTube and other platforms disseminating hate speech. This allowed the young to debate the notion of diversity, thus opening a space for discussion of Japanese nationhood, a subject that remains highly taboo in institutionalised political spheres. In the latter, young Internet users have seized upon the relative cover provided by the technicality of discussions on linguistics to critically debate Chinese influence in Taiwanese society through linguistic practices and the inclusion (or not) of terms from the continent. The widespread use among Taiwanese youth of a vocabulary distinct from the PRC has thus crystallised a wider debate on national identity, bringing out multiple voices. In both cases, young people have seized upon ideational spaces left relatively unattended as states have proven reluctant to take on some of these subjects.

Across Northeast Asia, digital spaces have played a major role for the young as a place for exchange and for the manifestation of alternative expressions of national belonging. Even in situations where activism is also in person and direct, such as student mobilisations in China or environmental mobilisations in South Korea, the Internet is still used as a complementary communication and mobilisation tool. In cases involving direct forms of contestation, online networks make it possible to inform, raise awareness and call for action, but are less of a place for active national identity-building for young activists (Chapter 6, Kang and Orsini; Chapter 7, Albana). In any case, in methodological terms, a significant finding that runs through many of the contributions in this book is the pre-eminence of online forms of mobilisation, and consequently the shift of research terrains to digital spaces – including discussion forums, television programmes and Internet broadcasting channels, video games, cyber-literature or social networks such as Instagram or Twitter. This

trend towards online/virtual objects of study – be it in the humanities or social sciences – has become more pronounced since 2020, when the global pandemic closed many borders, greatly reducing communication channels but also the possibilities of access to places and people. However, when adopting online questionnaires, remote interviews or discursive analyses based on online data, researchers must adapt to new research spaces for which the development of methodological tools is still sometimes in its infancy. In most cases, the contributors to this book seem to have favoured a multi-methodological approach, i.e., an approach alternating between micro (with detailed analyses of specific texts or images, or close reading) and macro scales (where the context is the dominant issue and allows for distance from the objects). Moreover, the necessarily limited interactions with the field, and thus the studied actors themselves, produce a shift in the book's focus away from the study of the actor-subjects themselves and towards the study of textual forms in the instruments implemented by these actor-subjects. In other words, the 'netography' that replaces ethnography puts the emphasis on the statements rather than on the actors themselves, their trajectories or attitudes, which remain unknown in the anonymity of the Internet. It is possible that the absence of an anthropologist or sociologist in this book explains this phenomenon, but in general, research on virtual space implies new epistemological and methodological paradigms that remain to be explored in the future.

Notes

1 Notably the People's Republic of China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos.
2 I.e., the right to freely choose and directly elect the territory's chief executive.

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