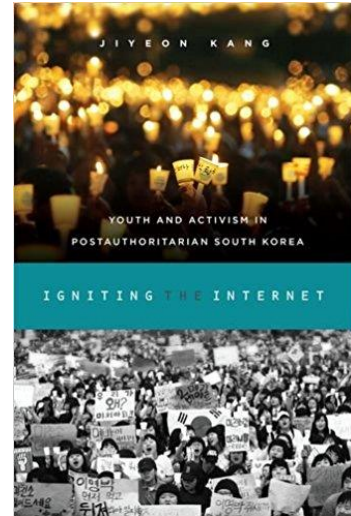


Jiyeon Kang, **Igniting the Internet: Youth and Activism in Postauthoritarian South Korea**, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2016, 241 pp., \$68.00 (hardcover).

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In ***Igniting the Internet: Youth and Activism in Postauthoritarian South Korea***, focusing on two large-scale, youth-driven movements in postauthoritarian South Korea, Jiyeon Kang examines the birth and lingering effects of 21st-century Internet activism. Kang focuses on the impetus of these movements, the online communities in which they percolate, and the offline actions that result from this online engagement. The longitudinal nature of Kang's study sets it apart from other studies interested in the effects of political engagement. While many are concerned with the political consequences of online activity, Kang's study examines the personal consequences for the young South Koreans who participated in online-initiated candlelight protests. By gathering these personal experiences, Kang discovers what led South Korean teenagers to become more politically active in the Internet Age. Rejecting technological determinism, Kang determines that the rise of youth activism has much more to do with a politics of captivation than any inherent rebellion within Internet communication.



Kang identifies a 2002 tragedy as the inciting incident for the age of Internet activism in South Korea. On June 13, two schoolgirls were killed by a U.S. Army vehicle. The incident was clouded by the World Cup, but once the excitement of the sporting event faded, activists went online to voice their disgust and anger at the U.S. soldier's acquittal. These engaged citizens were already familiar with organizing online to participate in events related to the World Cup. After the tragedy, they used online message boards to organize candlelight vigils to honor the girls who died and to protest American overreach.

While the Internet allowed these young activists to communicate and gather, Kang argues that the focus should be on the way online communication supports the social and cultural practice of captivation. Kang feels mainstream media use the language and parameters of existing political perspectives, whereas the Internet can capture the fleeting yet intense nature of captivation. Captivation, aided by the Internet's openness to alternative discourse, reveals shared collective sentiments that remain unrealized in offline communication. Kang argues that these unarticulated sentiments fuel the politics of captivation and manifest in youth movements such as the 2002 candlelight vigils and 2008 candlelight festivals in South Korea.

Instead of focusing on young people's proclivity for social media use to explain the early 2000s activism in South Korea, Kang looks at the category of *postauthoritarian youth* to explain the emergence of candlelight protests. Postauthoritarian youth is not constituted by demographics, but rather by the historical context in which South Korean teenagers in the early 2000s came of age. The term does not

indicate any particular ideology, but marks the end of existing frameworks organizing vocabulary, identity, and political engagement. Postauthoritarian youths are then working within new frameworks free from existing boundaries. These frameworks are facilitated in online spaces that allow for participation without any central, hierarchal approval process.

Kang examines youth as a social construct directly affected by national identity and present political realities. Postauthoritarian South Korean youths are the first to live in democratic Korea without directly fighting for democracy. Residual Cold War pillars, such as anticommunism and alliance with the United States, became less important following democratization. Kang demonstrates how this shift in popular sentiment aligns with South Korea's official initiative to lead the Information Age following the 1997-98 financial crisis. The government-bolstered online culture in the hands of postauthoritarian youth allowed for underlying national sentiments to culminate in youth-filled offline protests.

While Kang recognizes nascent anti-American dissent and antiglobalism within the candlelight protests, she acknowledges that many participants likely did not understand the complexities of Korean-U.S. relations while attending the protests. However, this does not mean that wider, unspoken dissent was not the driving force behind this new form of public gathering. Participants gathered to protest that the U.S. soldier was not held accountable for the deaths of the two girls, but in line with the politics of captivation, the tragic event was one instance in a long history of perceived injustice felt by South Korean citizens. South Koreans felt increasingly helpless in the face of their country's agreements with the United States, and Kang finds, through captivation, that the Internet allowed the specific protests to transform into a larger statement about global relations.

In addition to mobilizing young protesters, the Internet also played a new and important role in South Korean politics in the early 2000s. This political intervention also centers around the concept of captivation, and Kang demonstrates how the Internet is particularly well suited to this type of political engagement. Captivation with politicians is not a new phenomenon, but young, democratic Koreans are especially adept at using the Internet to cultivate and disseminate opinions on political leaders. Captivation with politicians places an emphasis on ethos, often at the expense of critical discussion. However, Kang is quick to avoid falling into an expected pessimistic dismissal of online political engagement. She recognizes that online spaces can be free of barriers found in other media. Rather than encouraging citizens to experience their unease in isolation, the Internet pushes beyond private sentiments and allows people to relate through their experiences. This type of engagement is what ultimately led to the candlelight protests and their lasting effects on participants. Kang also points out that the politics of captivation can make way for marginalized groups to enter mainstream politics, as captivation is not beholden to established political discourse.

Kang uses the transformation of the 2002 candlelight vigils to the 2008 candlelight festivals to illustrate the power of the Internet in establishing these gatherings as a standard type of protest. In 2008, young Koreans took to the streets with candles in hand to protest the import of beef from the United States in the wake of mad cow disease. Whereas the vigils commemorating the schoolgirls in 2002 were solemn, the 2008 protests had a much different feel despite their similarities of candles, young women,

and online organization. Kang characterizes the 2008 protests and festivals as much livelier than their 2002 counterparts.

Again, Kang looks to the politics of captivation to understand how online unease about beef imports led to mass gatherings. She finds that the candlelight festivals had more to do with distrusting the agreements formed with foreign entities than they did with contaminated beef. Citizens did not trust their government to protect them from threat, especially if exposing citizens to threat improved U.S.-Korean relations. First, online spaces, and then candlelight festivals allowed young Koreans to voice this underlying distrust by focusing specifically on contaminated meat imported from the United States.

The 2008 candlelight festivals introduced a new practice to the protest tradition taken directly from online discourse. The teenagers often brought posters and graphics to the protests containing parodies meant to subvert the official messages released by the government. For example, protesters would alter images of public officials by changing their faces into cartoon cows or making them openly confess their desperate desire to gain favor with the United States. Kang adeptly explains these layered messages and how they originate in Internet culture. Online, parody circulates widely due to the promise of anonymity and the immediacy of circulating information. The fact that South Korean youth brings these same practices into offline spaces, which do not provide the same protections, demonstrates how the Internet directly affects the way young people "do" politics in postauthoritarian Korea. Kang asserts that "feel-good" activism, as seen in the transformation from the 2002 vigils to the 2008 festivals, does not equal meaningless protests. She demonstrates the lasting effects of the protests by turning to participants whose political expectations were reshaped through their engagement with the candlelight gatherings.

Kang found that even though participants mostly settled into school and traditional careers, their opinions about politics were permanently altered by being a part of candlelight protests. Through recounting their memories of the protests, South Koreans recharacterized dissent. They felt political activism was not something that required devotion or long-term commitment, but something more playful. Popular political participation is driven by captivation, and the Internet facilitates and organizes this expression of collective voices.

Kang provides an integral intervention into the discussion of modern Internet activism. Rather than dismissing online initiatives as "slacktivism," Kang takes a longitudinal approach to show the impact of activism through individual participants. Her focus on the politics of captivation highlights the distinct nature of Internet activism involving temporary alliances and freedom from established political discourse. One great strength of Kang's analysis is its thorough and engaging explanation of the local and historical contexts surrounding the 2002 and 2008 protests. In addition, contrasting the two separate activist movements strongly supports Kang's notion of captivation and illustrates that while Internet-led movements may not lead to the drastic political changes they seek, they have lasting impact within the public repertoire and among their participants. Kang's accessible and engaging book is ideal for those engaged with youth movements and those interested in social media more broadly. While the book provides an important contribution to Korean studies, Kang's ample contextualization makes it accessible for those unfamiliar with South Korean politics. *Igniting the Internet* validates youth movements by recognizing that Internet activism functions in unique ways and, therefore, has different, yet still lasting outcomes.