Workshop D

Information Technology and Active Citizenship in a Materialist World

by

Denny Ho Kwok-leung

Introduction
The coming of the information technological repertory has been understood as the phenomenon compared to the seas around Reformation Europe busy with a huge number of possibilities. One of the possibilities is that of being in virtual pocket of anyone on earth. The World Wide Web becomes a place offering a chance for tasting. Everyone comes in and out, with or without downloading and unzipping electronic materials, wandering around the labyrinth with the enchantment of being taught with texts and icons. The rise of information technology seems to be a good chance for developing countries to find a new way to inculcate the sense of citizenship, with the understanding that this kind of brand new technology broaders the conceptual horizon of people and encourages the spirit of exploration.

Nevertheless, academics feel dismay when they saw the effects of information technology, coming with the neo-liberal social policies on people, had been associated with ‘the growing inequality of wealth, income and life chances, the increasing surveillance, the dismantling or reconstruction of public institutions as profit making companies, the growing callousness and meanness of public life…[They]…deeply felt sense of the unfairness of it all, a sense of dismay at the erosion of human dignity and the withdrawal of social rights, especially for the poorest and the most vulnerable.’

While the welfare state was the means by which economic and social unfairness were to a large extent tackled successfully, the capacity of the state in a world with new communications technologies has been questioned. The mobility of huge capital disables the government to create job opportunities by administrative measures, and also the globalising culture industries exert great pressures on national cultural identities and practices. The shrinking role of the national government leads to the disenchantment of its power to enable ordinary people to flourish as individuals and as communities. The advent and diffusion of new technologies through economic, political and social life has greatly

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2 Barns, Ian, 1999. ‘Technology and citizenship,’ Alan Petersen et al. (eds.) Poststructuralism,
affected the capacity of the state to control national economies. In this situation, there arises the question as to the meaning of an ‘acceptable’ sense of citizenship as a moral practice. Put simply, we should understand how individuals conceptualize their social roles and social positions in a world flourishing with new communications technologies. This paper is to explore the ways for the young people in Hong Kong construct their own responses to the new information technologies and the possibilities of the rise of active citizenship among the young people in this new era.

The Impacts of Information Technology

It is important to state at the outset that information technology does not enjoy the status of neutrality and technicity. Winner has succinctly pointed out that technologies are not merely instruments that we may use as means, instead they are ‘forms of life’ such that as we incorporate them into our world they subtly change the social relationship between human communities and technologies, and the sense of community and the sense of self-identity and embodiment are accordingly changed. To quote, ‘as they [technologies] become woven into the texture of everyday existence, the devices, techniques, and systems we adopt shed their tool-like qualities to become part of our very humanity. In an important sense we become the beings who work on assembly lines, who talk on telephones, who do our figuring on pocket calculators, who eat processed foods, who clean our homes with powerful chemicals.’

People then considered the immersion in cyberspace as the factor leading to the fact that ‘transformation of our environment into a “digital soup” will provide a target rich environment for theft, security, copyright, failures in the human/machine interface; indiscernible bugs with significant consequences; trusting the Zero-User-Interface, confusing simulation with the real event.’ The incorporation of technologies into social life has also been reckoned as the monster, undermining, decentring, fragmenting and externalizing the humanist self that enshrined by the thinkers advocating enlightenment humanism. However, Barns criticized this view as one-sided and suggested that how technologies ‘are actually interpreted will depend a great deal on people’s life-world interests, how technologies are represented, particularly in commercial advertising, but also through the interpretative influence of experts, regulators and early adaptors.’

It is true that individuals’ interpretation of the significance of technologies would differ and result in a wide spectrum of behavioral patterns. However, it is important to focus upon the government’s interpretation as the state remains the major institutions that has bearing on regulation of technological choices. As Ronfeldt argued that in view of the rise of Cyberocracy, the ‘government may change radically in the decades ahead…the development of, and demand for access to the future electronic

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1 See Note 2, p.156.
4 See Note 2, p.164.
information and communications infrastructures – i.e. ‘cyberspace’ – may alter the nature of bureaucracy…outcomes may include new forms of democratic, totalitarian, and hybrid governments.’

In view of technological change, the state alters its education policy and creates a new form of relationship between individuals and the state. Dudley analyzed the educational reform in both the United Kingdom and Australia and found that the rise of Neo-Fordism and Post-Fordism in association with technological upgrading changed the structures of these government. When information technology renders possible the fragmentation and decentralization of production, economic competition revolves around flexibility and efficiency. The international capitalist market turns out to be a place full of competition between nations. In order to react promptly to the changing national needs and the high degree of competitiveness of the nations, the national states must encourage national institutions to be efficient, flexible and responsible to changes in the international market. Dawkins went further to point out that the states in this situation would pursue the objective of excellence in higher education and measures include ‘measures to make more productive use of institutional resources and facilities, including institutional consolidations and more systematic credit transfer arrangement; greater targeting of resources at the institutional level and improved institutional arrangement; increased flexibility and incentives for performances for both institutions and individual staff; and encouragement of an environment of productive competition between higher education institutions.’

Greater emphasis on higher education is related to the reconceptualization that the aim of education is to contribute to the economic restructuring and national economic competitiveness. In other words, the higher education institutions are to take advantage of technological change, especially the advent of the information technology, to re-locate the national economy to a better position in global capitalism. Lifelong Learning is one of the mottos advocated by the Australia and British governments. The reasons for this strategic choice are crystal clear. As Dudley summarized: ‘in the context of globalization, lifelong learning is essential for maintaining a skilled flexibly responsive workforce. This flexibility requires the constant upgrading of skills and/or the re-skilling of workers in response to the rapidly and inevitably changing demands of the world economy so that, while workers need always to be learning, multi-skilling, reskilling and changing employment during their working lives.’ Of most important, the language of the lifelong learning programmes and of the learning society ‘is seductively of participation, agency, control over one’s own life, independence and empowerment.’ These languages have a great impact on the individuals because, while lifelong learning provides opportunities to citizens for personal development, it also suggests an unending task, that learning has become a ‘life sentence’. This also shows the impacts of the advent of information

10 Ibid., p.89.
technology: the endless development of information technology requires individuals’ endless active learning. The most important implication of this change is that, as Dudley argued, “the learning society is also the OECD’s ‘active society’ where each citizen is a worker, an ‘active participant’ in the community...The life of the community is effectively defined as work, or participation in the economy...In both the active society and the learning society, therefore, life and citizenship are conflated with work and participation in the economy, particularly in ways which will enhance the competitiveness of the nation’s economy in world markets. As learning is required for successful economic participation, so too it is required for successful participation in life. A nexus is constructed between citizenship and economic participation. Without learning and active participation as learners-workers, citizenship risk their equal participation in the citizenship community. The obverse of the nexus between citizenship and economic participation is that those not actively employed or learning are necessarily diminished in their citizenship status and rights entitlements.”

Here comes in the issue about the possibility that the young people are being included into the mainstream of work. When work is the major form of participation, those who are unemployed as workers would lose their citizenship and rights. This is certainly an issue of social exclusion. Nevertheless, the young people in Hong Kong are very likely to be subject to social exclusion, partly due to the advent of information technology and partly due to the limited power for the young people to resist against such a social trend towards a Post-industrial world. In the following section, we analyze the Post-industrial pattern of employment in Hong Kong, and go further to examine the social forces that could protect the youth from social exclusion. Finally, we shall focus on the dominance of the government’s discourse of active learner and lifelong learning and argue that the subjectivity of the youth is largely shaped by the official discourse on work.

The coming of Post-Industrial employment structure in Hong Kong

Esping-Andersen found that in a post-industrial society services became the major source of employment in both relative and absolute terms. Moreover, social and business services turned out to be more dynamics than the consumer services. These phenomena did not come as a surprise since many studies had shown the marked decline of the traditional manual working class and a modest rise in white-collar middle class occupations. The expansion of the professionals also came as expected. In Hong Kong, we found a similar pattern towards post-industrial employment structure. As shown in Table 1, in the period of 1986-1997, the working population involved in the traditional economy decreased from 67.2% to 55.9%. In 1997, the service economy absorbed 36.6% of the working population, a proportion larger than that of Germany in 1985. The expansion of the working population in the commercial sector needs more attention since it becomes the sector having the larger

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11 Ibid., p. 90-91.
share among the three sub-types of service economy. In other words, there arises the need for more educated people to support such an expansion. We surmise that commercial sector may more likely recruit those people with credentials and hence formal qualification is the most important means for the young people to enter this sector.

As shown in Table 2, the expansion of the professionals and semi-professionals is prominent. The traditional manual workers shared a smaller proportion in 1997, the share decreased from 42.5% in 1993 to 38.4% in 1997. The Fordist occupations as a whole also decreased from 77.5% in 1993 to 71.5% in 1997 while the post-fordist occupations increased from 22.5% to 28.5% in the same period. We also noticed the decline of the shares of managers and skilled workers. The decline of fordism may lead to stagnation in the relative number of managers and to a decrease among the skilled manual proletariat. The ‘exit’ for this redundant stratum is certainly a social issue. Probably they would be absorbed either in welfare state programs or in the unskilled service stratum. In other words, they create a stream of labour supply to the service sector and become the competitor with the young people. Job opportunities for the young people seem to be shrinking because of the great concern with qualifications and of the competition with the redundant stratum coming from the traditional fordist occupations.

Table 1: Working Population by sectors, Hong Kong (1986, 1996, 1997), the United States (1988) and Germany (1985) (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Economy</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Occupations Classification by years, Hong Kong (1993, 1995, 1997), the United States (1988) and Germany (1985) (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Occupation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>(7.1)</td>
<td>(7.1)</td>
<td>(7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Workers</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled Workers</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fordist Occupation</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Professional</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled/Unskilled Service Workers</td>
<td>(7.1)</td>
<td>(7.1)</td>
<td>(7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Industrial Occupation</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The Dominance of the Materialist Attitude

The chance for the young people to enjoy social inclusion seems to be dim given that the labour market put emphasis on credentials and experience in technology. The coming of the information technology requires workers to acquire mental power in the application of high level technology. Wiener pointed out that innovation ability is the essential element for workers to survive in a high-tech world. Moreover, it is necessary to foster the growth of ‘free riders’ who are less profit-oriented and keen on innovation. Free-riders work for the realization of their personal values and interests, rather than for the pursuit of enterprise interests. The growth of this sort of explorers lies on the formation of a social domain where ideas and innovation are treasured and become respectable. Put simply, the social condition must be good enough to render the rise and continuity of such a social domain to foster innovation and exploration. This domain also provides a place where those young people with or without credentials could prove their innovation ability and survive the keen competition in a post-industrial world.

However, we found few social domains in Hong Kong that could offer a chance to assist young people to survive. The reasons for the absence of free-riders’ domain could be attributed to the dominance of materialist attitudes in Hong Kong. We conducted a research on the post-materialistic values in Hong Kong in 1993 and 1995. In this study, we were concerned with the growth of

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Table 1 shows the distribution of Materialist/Postmaterialist value types in Hong Kong. Surprisingly, out of 292 respondents only 1 respondent (0.3 per cent) can be categorized as a Postmaterialist, whereas Materialists outnumber Post-materialists by a wide margin, with 75.0 per cent of the respondents who can be classified as Materialists. All these findings run counter to Inglehart's hypothesis that Postmaterialist values are becoming more and more dominant when the younger generation growing up in an affluent and safe environment replaces the older generation who was growing up under a poor and precarious condition. We come to the conclusion that while Hong Kong remains in a continuous process of economic growth, only a few Hong Kong people have fostered Postmaterialist attitude in the 1990s.

Our analysis shows that the majority of the Hong Kong people could only be categorized as either Materialist or the Mixed type. Both were more concerned with the issues regarding economic growth, maintaining order and economic stability, rather than those issues arising from Postmaterialist concerns. Clearly, the postmaterialist value type has not been developed as high as the one in the Western world. A large proportion of Hong Kong people is still concerned about economic issues. It is interesting to see that the affluence of Hong Kong has not led to the growth of a strong sense of innovation. The importance of ideas and innovation are relegated to an insignificant position on the respondents' agenda. In other words, even if the small number of innovations does affect their quality of life, Hong Kong people would not be sensitive enough to aware the problems.

Table 3: Distribution of the Post-materialist/Materialist value types (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value type</th>
<th>1993*</th>
<th>1995**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materialist</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed type</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmaterialist</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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14 These studies were based the research suggested by Inglehart. See Inglehart, R. 1990. Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Control of the use of Technology

The advent of information technology seems to be appraised as the means bringing forth happiness and development. Nevertheless, as we have argued, the coming of the post-industrialism has gradually changed the employment structure in Hong Kong, and for the youth, there has not been any promise in the expansion of employment opportunities. Of most important, as the public in Hong Kong has acquired the impression that technology is neutral and has positive impacts on their quality of life, the negative impacts have seldom been put on the agenda of public policy. According to Beck, modernization and the advent of technology bought forth risk society and risk is inevitable and necessary in the process of modernization. He suggested that risk society is the radicalization of modernity. There are two elements in risk society, namely

- the reflex-like threat to industrial society’s own foundations through a successful modernization that is blind to dangers; and

- the growth of awareness, the reflection on the new situation.

A risk society emerges when the self-evident truths of industrial society (the consensus on progress, the abstraction from ecological consequences and hazards) dominate the thinking and behaviour of human beings and institutions, but its consequences turn out to be uncontrollable. The consequences of this process is the perpetuation of social bads. Nevertheless, the conflicts over the distribution of the ‘bads’ produced by the unbridled growth are superimposed on the conflicts over the distribution of societal ‘goods’ (income, jobs, social security). In industrial societies, the fundamental conflicts were over materialist issues and gradually led to attempts at solution in appropriate institutions, such as pluralist arrangement, democratic institutions, grassroots associations, etc. In risk society, social and political issues revolving around conflicts of accountability, that is, how the consequences of the risks accompanying commodity production can be distributed, averted, controlled and legitimated. Moreover, there is a need to find out innovative solutions to the current problems that is the result of the fact that ‘the relationship of society to the hazards and problems produced by it, which in turn exceed the bases of societal conceptions of security’? For Beck, the common dangers threatening our quality of life is the growth of environmental pollution and hazards. These sorts of problems however is ‘democratic’ in the


16 Ibid.: p. 29.
sense that they influence 'all social groups regardless of their class of origin and these risks are collective and invisible.' On the other hand, the most important point of Beck's arguments is his claim that the risks of contemporary society are unintended and inevitable, and are the product of the scientific organization of society and culture. The involvement of the scientific community raises an issue about the openness of this community. Beck insisted that science and scientific bureaucracies would attempt to cover up or even deny the fundamental character of environmental and scientific risks by suggesting an apparently ‘neutral’ notion of ‘acceptable’ levels of risk. In other words, the dominance of ‘experts’ is a feature of risk society. They determine which level of risk is acceptable.

In Hong Kong, the dominance of expertise is manifested through a lot of cases. In 1998, as a response to the food-borne illnesses such as the bird flu, E-1057 in beef and coral fish poisonings, the government created a new department of Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene Department to handle food safety. This department attempted to tap the pool of expertise to tackle crisis promptly. The absorption of expertise targeted on medical practitioners and relevant experts, 'like doctors and nurses, vets from the Agriculture and Fisheries Department, and health inspectors, street sweepers and market managers from the two municipal services boards.' When these illnesses menaced Hong Kong, the government counts on the knowledge and capacity of the experts. However, there is a doubt about the ability of the expertise to work out the acceptable level of risks. That the expertise's ability is questionable could be illustrated through the case of dioxin. The threat arising from the Belgian food scare caused by dioxin contamination in June 1999 revealed a fact that scientific knowledge could not manipulate nature. A scholar said that "There is no such thing as a safe level when talking about dioxin." Clearly experts are not able to work out an acceptable level of risk in the case of dioxin contamination.

The dominance of expertise is also revealed by urban design. The proliferation of 'themed environment' promotes fantasies of wealth, exoticism and technological progress through malls, arcades, amusement zones, department stores and home furnishings. Behind this process are commercialism and the profit motives, controlling the forms of presentation and retail strategies.

There are a number of problems of the dominant role of the experts. First, the admittance of an acceptable level of risk implies the failure of the expert to control the external environment or the outcomes of industrialization. Claiming that certain level of risks is acceptable implies that there are some areas that the experts are not able to ensure ‘certainty’. The failure case about the bird flu in Hong

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18 Hong Kong Standard, November 14, 1998.
19 Hong Kong Standard, June 27, 1999.
Kong is a case in point. Medical practitioners and the bureaucracy were handicapped in controlling its spread. Nor could scientific knowledge help out. Secondly, the responsibility of the expert to the medical mishaps becomes unclear. As revealed in the case reported in a newspaper about a medical mishap in a private hospital, the reporter accepted the excuse that medical practitioners were not invincible: "medicine can never guarantee a cure. Furthermore, complications can occur, which no one could expect. To put the patient and the health care profession in opposition partly through imposition of criminalization amounts to tying the health care professional's hands before the healing process even begins. More, in the extreme, doctors may be forced to play safe and practice "defensive mechanism", requesting all sorts of testing, albeit a minor ailment. All these are definitely not to the advantage of the patient."21 This consideration appears to accept doctors' excuse rather than working out institutional arrangement to avoid malpractice. Thirdly, there have been few public discussions over the reliability of experts. In fact, there were a lot of issues reflecting the lack of laymen involvement. When the food-related illnesses such as bird flu and coral poisoning appeared in Hong Kong in 1997 and 1998, the government merely turned to the pool of expertise to get assistance. The lack of grassroots' attention may be related to the lack of educational materials and peoples' apathy towards environmental issues. A scholar commented that 'the books available (for local primary and secondary students) tend to talk about abstract theories and the latest technologies instead of the relationships between the environment and the community.'22 However, we should point out that the situation in Hong Kong is not so much the dominance of expertise as the preeminence of the civil servants. Policy-making domains are largely dominated by the civil servants at the high echelons but they fail to embrace ideas to improve the living conditions of the territory. Scathing attacks targeted on the civil servants who were said to be the proponents of 'outdated' pollution policies. A report, titled Heading Towards Sustainability? Practical Indicators of Environmental Sustainability for Hong Kong by the University of Hong Kong Center of Urban Planning and Environmental Management, points out that "what various government agencies are proposing today are generally more of the same approaches which allowed the environment to deteriorate in the first place."23

In the light of Beck's framework of risk society, we have brought forth another issue. Under the dominance of the bureaucracy and expertise, what are the institutional management for the grassroots to maintain and improve their quality of life. Beck has related the issues of ecological hazards to the domain of citizenship through the idea that 'the ecological issue focuses at heart on a systematic legalized violation of fundamental civil rights - the citizen's right to life and freedom from bodily harm.'24 The realization of the rights to life and freedom would enhance our quality of life. In contrast, given that environmental hazard prevails and the rights to life and freedom are menaced, the quality of life of a social collectivity is adversely affected. Therefore, the rise of risk society necessitates a good communication between the

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21 Hong Kong Standard, August 29, 1998.
22 Si-wai, Man, cited from Hong Kong Standard, April 1 1999.
23 Hong Kong Standard, January 23 1999.
expertise and bureaucracy on the one hand and the grassroots on the other. The interplay between these two parties could be maintained by a stable political environment and through which rational communications management strategies as a tool of crisis management are rendered possible.

Channels for Resistance against the dominance of techno-experts
The control by expertise in city life has been highlighted by urban sociologists. Analyses has called attention to the disappearance of public space. Gottidiener argued that public space is ‘a place of communion where public interaction occurs, where people can meet others at their leisure, and where free and open discussions can take place. When scholars discuss the concept of a public space, most often they have in mind, as the ideal type, the agora or open marketplace of the classical Greek cities. The idea behind the concept is a place that allows for public interaction, not simply the outside environment of our present cities where people rush to and fro after their own affairs without communion with their fellow citizens.’

Looking for public space in Hong Kong seems to be the outcome of nostalgic sentiment rather than of realistic assessment. Geographically mobility is high in Hong Kong. It is somewhat difficult for Hong Kong people to take the advantage of traditional communions to develop their public spaces since urban renewal and development have a very devastating effect on local communities. The government attempted to establish Mutual Aid Committee system at the grassroots level, but, for various reasons, this plan failed. The District Boards System aims to fulfil the advisory function and thus attracts a very small population of politicians to compete for seats at the Boards. The low rate of participation at the neighbourhood level results in a disappointing urban scene. The grassroots do not have sufficient public space to assess their quality of life. Despite of the fact that the urban life is to a large extent manipulated by the expertise and bureaucracy, their voices are hardly heard. We also noticed that Hong Kong people have been assaulted by the twin forces of consumerism and the invasion of the mass media. The prevailing situation seems to tell us that individual ideas and feelings are no longer allowed to percolate in their own time from the street level to political channels and democratic devise for the public expression of sentiments. Individuals' preferences are aggregated by public opinion polls and media coverage. Anxiety about ecological risks are denied by advertisements and experts' professional judgement. The public space is in fact commodified by malls and arcades. The issue arising from the cyberspace seems to be unnoticed. We know that cyberspace is intrinsically a collective space in which interaction with others could lead to either domination and violence or collective creative intelligence. Nevertheless, in Hong Kong neither the physical space nor the cyberspace turns out to be a public space in which collective intelligence is fostered. Instead, as Gottdiener argued, ‘these new spaces are themed environments. They are not 'public' because they are owned and controlled as commercial businesses…they allow for

26 Ibid., p. 139.
personal self-expression only within the constraint of consumer identity. The mall may be the new space of public communion, as some have suggested, but it functions in that capacity only within the very restricted context of consumption.\textsuperscript{27}

To resist against these trends relies on the social awareness of the public. Regarding the young people, resistance also lies on their social awareness and the possibility of having social positions within the mainstream. Two domains are important for the youth to have social awareness and innovation ability, namely the communities and educational institutions. However, there has been little effort in Hong Kong on the formation of community access to telematics services. Carter has argued that ‘social innovation in the community – involving local government, schools and colleges, public libraries, the voluntary sector, consumer groups and the trade unions, is a necessary counterpart to organisational innovation led by industry, commerce and government departments.’\textsuperscript{28} Unlike the strategies employed by the local government in the cities, for instance, Amsterdam, Bologna and Manchester where communal resources have been commanded to develop universal access to telematics services, there have been few communities in Hong Kong where community access centers are built. The idea underlying such strategies is that, according to Carter, it is to develop the ‘basis for establishing local, regional, national and international electronic networks that owe their existence to active policy-making through democratic and accountable action, for example on the part of local authorities, community organizations, trade unions, consumer groups and alliances of individuals, rather than to corporate business interests, governments or the whims of rich and powerful individuals…The ability of small-scale initiatives in cities and regions to use the advantages of the technologies, to use cyberspace, to create communication and activity networks free from the usual spatial and temporal constraints is a crucial element in providing a democratic counter-balance to other technological and global trends. The essential starting point for this must, however, be a commitment to creating services and applications that are easy (and cheap) to use, that grab people’s interest and imagination so that they want to use them and that, having used them, they become part of their lives enough that they would fight any attempt to limit them or take them away.’\textsuperscript{29}

In Hong Kong, the most powerful institution that could encourage the ‘governance of cyberspace’ and the establishment of universal access to telematics services is the SAR government. Obviously, the SAR government seemingly underestimates the contribution of communities to the use of information technology. As shown in a document issued by the Commission on Strategic Development titled \textit{Bringing the Vision to Life: Hong Kong’s Long-Term Development Needs and Goals}, education and vocational training in information technology are supposedly for the enhancement of Hong Kong’s competitiveness. To quote, ‘World-class human resources are critical if a location wants to enhance its

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 142.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 151.
competitiveness. One of the major policy priorities, therefore, is to ensure that Hong Kong people are fully equipped for the knowledge economy of the 21st Century by expanding their access to education and training. A fundamental overhaul of Hong Kong’s education and vocational training system is needed to meet the community’s changing needs. This process must take into account the best international practices. This would include providing an education system that stimulates innovative and creative thinking and enhances information technology...It is also essential for the Hong Kong community to recognize the importance of life-long learning. The Commission notes that the Government has been implementing a number of major initiatives to improve the quality of education and vocational training and welcomes the Education Commission’s review of the educational system. Nonetheless, the Education Commission held the view that lifelong learning in a knowledge-based society is to ‘enables learners to acquire up-to-date knowledge and skills to stay competitive in the rapidly changing and increasingly globalized economy.’ Since the government regards continuing education as the means to achieve economic benefits, the communities are expected to be responsible for funding it.

The Commission’s suggestion is that ‘continuing education should be funded on the ‘user-pays’ principle, as it helps to develop one’s potentials and raise one’s personal qualities. However, the entire community is obliged to promote continuing education. We therefore look to people of various sectors, such as employers, professionals bodied and social bodies to contribute manpower and resources.’ Clearly, the SAR government has not prepared to funded the programmes of continuing education. Given that young people expect to have chances to learn through these programmes, they have to fund themselves. Formal education seems to be less likely to become a place where young people could learn telematics technology, let along control and resist high-technology. Without the support of the government in respect of the establishment of communal access to high-technology and of the formal education, young people must participate in workplace as worker to become involved in the mainstream. But it is a form of economic participation rather than social participation. Hence, the extent to which young people could enjoy active citizenship in Hong Kong seems to be limited.

Conclusion

Living in cities, people are primed by mass media and advertisements. However, they may not be informed about the existence of the dominance of experts in high-tech knowledge. Young people, therefore, are not only subject to the threat of being excluded from the labour market, but also from social participation. However, Hong Kong people remain materialistic and less likely to be sensitive to post-materialist issues, and therefore ideas and innovation have not been placed at high priority. In addition, they are less interested in pursuit of more say in government and political domains, nor in the fights for citizenship. This cultural sentiment provides a very conducive environment for the fostering of the

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30 Commission on Strategic Development, the Hong Kong SAR Government, 2000. Bringing the Vision to Life: Hong Kong’s Long-Term Development Needs and Goals, p.27.
32 Ibid., p.103.
dominance of expertise and bureaucracy. Hence, even if the young people in Hong Kong show a very high level of satisfaction with their personal and social life domains, we should bear in mind that we are living in a city where our quality of life has been affected by the lack of opportunity to improve our living conditions and/or to challenge the dominance of the expertise and bureaucracy. Even though the SAR government be aware of the importance of education in information technology, its orientation is somewhat instrumental and less sensitive to the importance of fostering controls over the use of technology by young people, the chance of educating young people to be active citizenship is dim.