TRANSNATIONAL WELFARE ADVOCACY AGAINST ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION? SOCIAL CONTOURS OF INFORMATIONAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses to the emerging issues for regional/global welfare issues, with special focus on the potentials and influences of the transnational advocacy activism for human and welfare rights. Part One of the paper outlines the emergence of transnational (cyber-)activism for global welfare. It is followed by a discussion of the incompatibility between economic globalization and regional/local deprivation, as well as the potentials for welfare promotion and empowerment. Part Four critically examines the contours and complexity of informational society. The last two parts delineate, respectively, the barriers against and prospects of global welfare activism.

1. GLOBAL WELFARE ADVOCACY WITH CYBER-ACTIVISM

Thanks to the Information and communication technologies (ICT) and its multiple representations (text, audio-video and others), we are in a new era of digital economy, polity and society (Nie and Erbring 2000; Tapscott 1996; US Commerce Dept. 2000). Participatory politics at global scale is possible to incorporate most forms of communications: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many. Perhaps, this is the real offering, and challenge, of the Internet, which is evolving around different (cable, wireless and satellite) modal of communications, representing both micro as well as mass media functioning (Morris and Ogan 1996). In reality, cyber-activism has become very revolutionary in changing the mode of interactions for advocacy and empowerment, power relationship between public service providers and users, and the governance structure (Alexander and Pal eds. 1998, Walch,1999), take the case of South Korean Jinbo.net, the APC (Association of Progressive Communications) networking and the activism for cyber-rights and human rights (Hick, et al 2000; et al. 2002). The key issues here are the interactivity, active participation, and the progressive agenda setting of the socio-political activists upon their global policy system they are in: virtual political communities could be the opportunities for individuals to become instrumental in global policy making.

1.1 Transnational Welfare Activism (TWA) and Democracy: the Politics of Globalized Space

Strategically, the new, alternative (electronic) mode of communication for political purpose can, at least

in theory, enables on-line, real time and full participation of citizens in governing their society at various geographical levels: local, regional and global. ICT is referred by James N. Rosenau (1998: 46-7) as one of the functional equivalents of democratic governance in *Globalized Space* where transnational issues (say, the rights of migrant workers and refugees) are beyond the control of nation-state nor the state-sponsored institutionalised regime, like the UN (Rosenau 1997):

> The widespread growth of the Internet, the World Wide Web and the other electronic
> technologies that are shrinking the world offers considerable potential as a source of
> democracy... by facilitating the continued proliferation of networks that know no
> boundaries, these technologies have introduced a horizontal dimension to the politics
> of Globalized Space. They enable like-minded people in distant places to converge,
> share perspectives, protest abuses, provide information and mobilize resources –
> dynamics that seem bound to constrain vertical structures that sustain governments,
> corporation and any other hierarchical organizations (Rosenau 1998: 46).

The activism derived from and through the Internet /Cyberspace (Cyber-activism) by default is borderless though the networks some sometimes geographically confined or concentrated -- particularly the hosting servers and websites in the territorial jurisdictions without censorship regime: global cities of the developed world. In other words, the locational choice of the TAN agencies is still important though the activism can shape regional affairs beyond its locality (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 1999; Sassen 1998). Yet, it should be noted that the cross-border advocacy is by no mean borderless nor non-territorial, as the locations or nodes of protest organizing and social mobilization is still very much geographic specific. On the other hand, cities and micro regions with high concentration of informational flow (London, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore) usually attracts the physical location of INGOs (like Oxfam and World Visions) because of their comparative advantage in ICT – this gives the seemingly borderless, transnational activism a geographical location (for detail elaboration, see Pipper and Uhlin, forthcoming edited volume).

For the promotion of global human welfare and rights, three distinct yet inter-related analytical debates on the governance of, and participatory politics in, the global system should be noted: the *'Globalized Space'* thesis of James N. Rosenau (1997, 1998), the *Cosmopolitan Democracy* concept mooted by David Held (1998, 1999), and the *Transnational Advocacy Networks* (TAN) analysis of Margarett E. Keck and Kathry Sikkink (1998, 1999). Confronting the globalization and the problematique of the governance for it, Rosenau (1997,1998) rights identifies the nascent social agencies, networks and actions: NGOs, the Internet and social movements respectively. The conditions through which the new participatory dynamics emerge are important: in the cities and micro regions under the conditions of the dissaggregation of economic and political power as many more agencies are

involving.

Global welfare advocacies are an integral part of the democratization project. Our notion of E-Democracy (democratization aided by ICT) is in line with the theory of Cosmopolitan Democracy of David Held (1998, 1999), in which he argues that, in a world of overlapping communities of fate, *Cosmopolitan Democracy* is the creation of new political institution (both intern-nation and civil society involving) and a diversity of NGOs in global civil society, with the democratic principle and praxis of broad access avenues of civic participation at national, regional and international levels. More specifically, E(lectronic)-Democracy is defined here as the democratisation process aided by the ICT (wired and wireless applications of phone/fax/SMS) and Internet with various forms of E-Mobilization. The democratisation in the informational society undoubtedly involves social mobilization in the Net. E-Democratic praxis will push the government to respond virtually and in reality, but the E-government project *per se* is distinct from E-Democracy as the state might have different political objectives, other than or excluding democratisation.

On activism and mobilization fronts, E-Mobilization (Cyber-Activism) is the process of the strategic use of the mass media NGOs or INGOs, and the recent (e-) mobilization in/beyond the cyberspace with the Activists-to-Activists, NGOs-to-Activists, Activists-to-NGOs communications using various means of ICT, such as, fax and Short-Message-Sending (SMS), webpages and hyperlinks. For instance, E-mails and mobile phone's text are central tool for global social protests against capitalist globalization: just before the WTO Seattle meetings, about 1500 NGOs signed on the anti-WTO declaration using e-mails and text mail (Brecher, 2000: 83). In short, the Internet gives the leverage for ordinary people and social movements to fight with governments, big businesses and the mass media.

Putting *Cosmopolitan Democracy* in its *Globalized Space:* TWA is a new form of social action addressing to the transnational nature of the socio-economic issues and questing the governance of them. TWA, coupled with E-democratic praxis (direct action by individuals), will promote cross-territorial and/or non-institutional base politics, transnational community, as well as its democracy, for transnational fate under the challenge of globalization of capital and economic processes (Held 1998, 1999; Rosenau 1997,1998). In our later elaboration, the role of the nascent social agencies (NGOs and cyber-activists), their global networking via the Internet, in the participatory politics of transnational welfare activism (TWA) will be highlighted.

1.2   Embracing ICT into the political life of Information Society

Despite regional difference in the inter-connectivity of ICT (Moss and Townsend, 2000), the creation of Cybrespace through a maximal integration of ICT locally and globally has been extending the way, mode and form of communications, doing-business and policy-making, and hence the constitution of new and distinct (cyber)culture, (virtual) community and (virtual) reality (Arnonowitz, et al. 1996;

Featherstone and Burrows, Eds.,1995) which in turn shaping the social processes as well as the political culture (Rash,1997). The importance of the Internet can be highlighted by the following two examples.

Embracing the cyberspace politically can be seen in the Japanese e-Japan initiatives for e-government (http://www.e-gov.go.jp/) and the Prime Minister's E-Newsletter Campaign (http://www.kantei.go.jp/) for political communications, with over one million of subscribers in a week time in Summer 2001. Another one is the so-called Third Sector approach of the Grameen Telecom, an affiliate of the Bangladesh's Grameen Bank, uses ICT to reinforce the Bank's networking momentum in its branch infrastructure, particularly in helping the rural households to access to cyberspace and global community, which in turn offers possibly ample opportunity for rural households to be involved in the income-generating activities of e-commerce and hence, the Bank could become the incubator of a host of rural Bangladeshi dot-coms (Goldstein and O'Connor 2000). But the socio-political questions like, e-governance and e-equity, have not been on the policy agenda. In actuality, the informational mode can be represented by the round-the-clock global production, communication and exchange regime (Castells 1996, 200), and the one being reinforced by a global regime of capital financing, located at the so-called 'informatic or telematic city' (Downey and McGuigan 1999; Graham and Marvin 1996; Leyson and Thrift 1997).

2.   WELFARE NEGLECTS IN TECHNOPOLIS

So far, global economic liberalization and globalization are not compatible to global/local welfare. Times change, technology changes, and we move inexorably into the twenty-first century. We live in a new economy of global capitalism that is both informational and networked. Juxtaposed against the decline of welfare capitalism that results from welfare-state reforms, the new, ICT-based governance structure of the so-called information society is emerging (Castells 2000; McChesney, Wood, and Foster 1998). The role of ICT in global capitalism (what Dan Schiller refers to as *digital capitalism* — the condition in which ICT networks directly generalize the social and cultural range of the capitalist economy) is greater than ever before. For instance, a U.S. Department of Commerce report reveals, among other things, that information technology (IT) accounts for half or more of the improvement in productivity growth since 1995; that IT is lowering inflation; and that, between 1994 and 1998, employment in IT industries expanded by 30 percent, from 4.0 million to 5.2 million jobs. In addition, these jobs average $58,000 a year, 85 percent higher than the average for the private sector (U.S. Department of Commerce [DOC] 2000). Although the idea of digital capitalism is predominantly for the developed world, the assertion that the corporate-led market system has been somewhat globally transcended is very important:

What is historically new is a change in the sweep of corporate rule. For the first time

since its emergence in the early twentieth century, the corporate-led market system no

longer confronts a significant socialist adversary anywhere on the planet. Digital capitalism also is free to physically transcend territorial boundaries and, more important, to take economic advantage of the sudden absence of geopolitical constraints on its development. Not coincidentally, the corporate political economy is also diffusing more generally across the social field. (Schiller 1999, 205)

Responding to trends in globalization, the state's planned development of a "Technopolis" becomes the iconography for futuristic high-tech society, particularly the ICT-enhanced and -intensive mode of production in the next millennium (Castells and Hall 1994. These projects are for national economy competitiveness, mostly being initiated by the strong states in the East (China, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore) and the West (the European Union and the United States). The creation of "technopoles" is no longer divided across political (Left and Right) ideologies. Some questionably "Asiatic democratic systems" have invested heavily for decades in upgrading their technologies and their selective utilization in society—the Singaporean and socialist Chinese states represent such an endeavour (Singapore Government 2000; Olds 1997).

Social life in the emerging ICT-based Technopolis will be different judging from the present high-tech system. First, productivity enhancement of both firms and individuals is one of the major achievements of integrating ICT into the production domain—although its contributions to quality of life may be dubious because the individuals must cope with, among other things, incoming messages from other time zones during night-time sleeping hours. Second, the division between working and leisure times, and between the domestic and the official, will become more blurred. More specifically, information networking per se will likely become the only mechanism of defining one's own identity and entitlements, because most of the gate-keeping functions of policy design will anchor upon the database and information-processing systems (Katz 1997).

Third, sophisticated network systems originating in the Technopolis will comprise the essential infrastructure for engorged transnational corporations that pursue export-oriented and regionally (or even globally) integrated production and marketing strategies. Corresponding to the ongoing build-up of transnational production and financial chains, therefore, are powerful, pan-corporate, international financial institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank) whose aim is to subject global social development to neo-liberal regulatory norms (Schiller 1999, 40).
Fourth (and most important of all), welfare neglect will become more than obvious, with the juxtaposition of poverty and social exclusion against bourgeoning e-commerce in the global cities such as New York and London. The capitalist state's investments are (or will be) more on ICT and future technologies than on social investments for the protection of the socioeconomically vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underprivileged—particularly when economic crisis (such as the recent Asian

financial crisis) occurs. More specifically, "The Internet is contributing to an ever-widening gap between rich and poor which has now reached 'grotesque' proportions" (UNDP 1999b,p.1; UNDP 1999a). Here, the critical issue is not only that of further development of ICTs, but also of equity and equality, and of redistributive justice in the transformation of global systems in general, particularly involving a shift from welfare capitalism to digital capitalism.

Last, but not least, the behavioral repertoire of individuals is being shaped in accordance with the information available on-time, real-time, just-in-time, and across former geographically bound time-zone differences. In actuality, the foremost development of the information age in every aspect of society and economy can be represented by the global, round-the-clock regime of production, communication, and exchange (Castells 1989, 1997). This trend is being reinforced by a global regime of capital financing, supported by ICT and its integration with the emergence of the so-called "informatic or telematic city" (Graham and Marvin 1996; Leyshon and Thrift 1997; Fathy 1991). More challenging is the new demand for individuals and communities to react, with good interpretive power and judgment, to real-time global events as mediated by ICT with massive loads of information and representation.

3. EMPOWERING THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

Equitable ICT distribution cannot be achieved exclusively through the market. In the future, it should be the goal of governments, non-governmental organizations, and private firms to ensure universal access to ICT (Patterson and Wilson 2000). If and when the government can promote ICT at the demand side for the empowerment of end users of health and welfare services, the social lives of the underprivileged may finally change; home-bound pursuits may be linked to the global network, with a higher and better quality of life as a result.

First, the availability of touch (-screen, -plate, or -tablet) and remote sensing devices can and should enable the maximum possible level of communication for the underprivileged via networks. In other words, ICT and its products, if effectively used by and accessible to the underprivileged, will likely shift our world-view of the value and strength of their performance, so that their contributions will finally be recognized as beneficial to the community at large.

Many discussion lists and hyperlinks, for example, have been serving multifunctional and multidimensional activities: policy advocacy, informational exchanges, and consultation. These have been changing the ways in which the underprivileged participate in sociopolitical life—locally, regionally, and globally (G. R. Simpson, "The Web's Final Frontier: City Hall," *Wall Street Journal,* 17 May 2000; E. Wax, "Immigrants Use Internet As a Link with Past," *Washington Post*, 3 February 2000. Second, the underprivileged and disadvantaged are, in most cases, less mobile than their counterparts,

and thus must anchor upon the communities in which they live. The physical constraints on these groups also limit their access to information and contacts with outside world. To remove the environmental barriers, ICT and the information to which it gives access can enable them to live and work in their limited places (domestic settings) yet with similar, if not equal, and equitable life chance.

Last but not least, *Net activism* has revolutionized the mode of interaction for advocacy and empowerment, power relationships between providers and users, and the structure of governance in the health and welfare sector (Walch 1999). The key issues here are interactivity, active participation, and the progressive agenda-setting of activists upon their respective policy systems. Virtual political communities could be the opportunity for individuals to become instrumental in policy making.

4.   THE SOCIAL CONTOURS OF INFORMATIONAL SOCIETY

The present geo-political system, at nation state, supra-regional (the EU case) and international levels (UN framework), can rarely resolve the tensions and conflicts on issues of social development (the quest for global/regional social policy). At the national level, the so-called 'representative democracy' system reinforces the problem of liberal democracy that the non-participatory political governance structure is controlled by elitist domination and party politics; and because of this, the state's legitimacy has always been questioned upon (Cooke and Kothai 2000). Neglecting the importance of these questions, the states start the e-government initiatives.

4.1   E-Government: Enhancing Efficiency for Political Conservatism?

The political solution so far for the adoption of ICT into public service is merely serving for better efficiency in administrative terms. Lately, people in the US can pay their local property taxes and parking tickets on commercial sites such www.govworks.com or www.ezgov.com. This indicates that e-commerce is more flexible and advanced than e-politics or e-policy. Other examples of e-government like the HiCitizen.com (http://www.hicitizen.com) and *FirstGov*. Many Asian Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs) also follow these footsteps towards e-government: All Asian NIEs have their respectively e-government portal: South Korea (http://www.egov.co.kr), Taiwan (http://www.gov.tw), Hong Kong (http://www.info.gov.hk/), Singapore (http://www.gov.sg/).
But these initiatives are not relevant to address the real question of politics and governance that government efficiency cannot solve the legitimacy and participatory questions. In other words, the utilization of ICT is not for 'policy-making quality', and the benefits of using ICT are mostly captured by the elitist, powerful, privileged, and selected few of the governing bodies. Again, this reflect the predominantly production/supply-bias mode of ICT utilization in public policy governance (cf. Andersen, ed., 1995; Andersen and Danziger 1995; Margetts, 1999; Garson, 2000). More problematic, the overall performance of ICT on the soft (norms and values), the most critical and controversial aspect

of political governance, is far from satisfactory. E-government cannot replace the politicking in real life - making choices in bound conditions, at the individual level as well as the society-at-large (Alexander and Pal, eds.,1998), not least is unfavorable consequences of e-government against the individuals' privacy and empowerment and their legal rights (Bennett and Grant,1999).

4.2 Health and Welfare Reform: The Supply Side Re-Engineering

The dynamics and logic of welfare-state reform, as well as the specific role of ICT, can be epitomized in health care reform. Containment of health care costs, along with the swing of the health-services pendulum from hospital care toward primary health and wellness promotion, and from acute illness treatment to chronic illness prevention. Furthermore, the commodification of health services by brining-in the market force (say, purchaser-provider split model) becomes a globally accepted recipe for health care reform. The context of health reform is that there are high technology, labor, and capital costs for health services and the advancement of medical knowledge allows the global population to live longer than before (see OECD 1990, 1992, 1994). Backed up by ICT, information science, and medical informatics in particular, the reform agency has been successful in uncoupling or blocking some professional influences from policy making. Yet, the information science and ICT applications are in the hands of the privileged group (powerful elites and the state), and mostly benefit the supply side rather than the underprivileged and end-users.

Under the new managerial regime and the full-scale "invasion" of ICT into the medical and health care sectors, global health care reform has three key targets:

1. The principle of cost-cutting, value for the dollar, bringing in the business, and creating a market for health care services, backed by ICT-based information science.
2. The shift from valuing clinical judgment to valuing clinical efficiency, usually backed by a new health informatics regime—say, using different Diagnosis-Related Groups or Unit Cost categories to monitor health treatment (Wiley 1994).
3. The movement toward some form of collective insurance and copayment—again, supported by information (insurance, financial, actuarial) science and ICT.

Yet, not many of the cost containment strategies (such as a cost-effectiveness or recovery approach) in health care reform actually have an optimal policy outcome, either because they wrongly target pricing on health products and services or they exacerbate the already inequitable distribution of resources in the public sector—or because market failures exist in the health-insurance system (Chernichovsky 1995; Hammer and Berman 1995). More problematic, the outcome of health care reform can be neither prescribed nor accounted for by information science or by a microeconomic managerial approach to

better health care. To recapitulate, the global strategies for health care reform, as well as the reinvention of the welfare state, are backed mostly by a new regime of informational governance: The main instrument is clearly defined by the *supply-side biased ICT application.*

Conversely, the underutilization of ICT on the demand (human) side of welfare and the health care sector is due to a combination of the following reasons:

- The information services do not meet the needs of indigenous people;
- Governmental support is lacking;
- Funds for high-cost ICT infrastructures are insufficient;
- Information technology is inadequate and inappropriate; and, more fundamentally,
- Governments do not recognize the role of ICT in political goodwill-building as an important part of socioeconomic development (Boon 1990).

Furthermore, as in the United States (where 65 percent of households have at least one computer and 43 percent of all households are connected to the Internet), the Internet today is a giant public library with a decidedly commercial tilt (Nie and Erbring 2000). More specifically, the penetration of ICT into different socioeconomic arenas generally follows a trickle-down: first (and most heavily) into the entertainment and economic (profit-making) arenas, then into educational and health-related ICT applications, and finally into the "unproductive sector" of social welfare (Khosrowpour and Loch 1993; Kraemer, Gurbaxani, and King 1992).

More often than not, ICT is considered to be the growth engine only for productivity and the generation of wealth, rather than for social development; for economic growth rather than for the progressive welfare of the people (especially the less privileged). To recapitulate, the impact of ICT is substantial and global, differential, unequal, and inequitable — yet there is potential for social development via the synergy of ICT and the welfare regime of governance.

4.3   Expanding Asian Cyber-Space: Embryo for Cyber-Activism?

Thanks to the state's e-government project, wired and wireless access for communication has been expanding tremendously, which also supports the burgeoning development of ICT market in Asia. According to a recent research by a media consulting firm (http://www.iamasia.com, 17 Jan. 2001), Internet use rises in the Greater China (mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan): more than 15 million people aged five and above are connected to the Internet in mainland China. Internet penetration was then at 7% of the Chinese urban population. Though penetration is far higher in Hong Kong at 34% (2.2. million) and Taiwan at 31% (6.4 million), the recent trend figures show that China is slowly catching up with Hong Kong – during the six months between April to December 2000, the number of Internet users in China increased by 15.4%, while Hong Kong recorded growth of just 9.7%. The same study shows that in mainland China, where many households do not have PCs, 39% of Internet users surf the Web

from work and 35% log on from Internet cafés. In Hong Kong, the vast majority (84%) of web users connect to the Net from home, while only a quarter do so from work. Meanwhile, 40% of Taiwanese Internet users go online from school.

On the other hand, the number of mobile Internet users in the Asia-Pacific region reached 34.4 million by the end of 2000, an increase of 29% in three months (Dataquest, 18 April 2001). Yet, there is geo-developmental difference: almost all of these users were Japanese or Korean: 26.8 million users of mobile Web services in Japan by the end 2000, and 7 million in South Korea. This is in line with the 'big jump' of the mobile phone uses in the region: 52% increase to 230 million in 2000, up from 151 million at the end of 1999. The region appears to be catching up the US and Europe. Much of the growth in user numbers came in China where the number of mobile phone owners doubled in 2000 to 85.3 million, up from 43.3 million at the end of 1999, similar trend of sharp increase recorded in same period (1999-2000): the Indian case, 97% to 3.1 million, and 132% increase to 6.3 million mobile user in the Philippines.

More people are hooked on the Net: almost 17% of China's urban population now has Internet access, up from 5.9% in March 2000 (China Daily, 26 June 2001), and the latest report from the China Internet Network Information Centre (18 July 2001) finds that there were then 26.5 million Internet users in China, up 17.7% since the start of the year and up 56.8% since July 2000. For the omnipresence of cyberspace (cf. Stefik 1999), despite its incubating of individualism, profit, self promotion and greed, the increase of both wired and wireless communications in volume, bandwidth and frequency terms largely helps to develop the size, power base and influence of critical mass for new alternative politicking in the cyberspace, which in turns challenges the traditional political establishment.

5.   THE BARRIERS AGAINST GLOBAL WELFARE (CYBER-)ACTIVISM

Undoubtedly, the size and volume of cyberspace will develop at geometric progressive scale. The latest estimates highlight that there will be 192 million Internet users in the Asia-Pacific region by 2005, up from 55 million (in 2000). Internet access will rise at a compound annual growth rate of 28 percent between 2001and 2005 (Yankee Group, 28 Jun 2001). The main factors driving growth in the region will be deregulation and lowering of bandwidth prices, though these will occur at different rates across the region. Two of the main obstacles to growth will be poverty and illiteracy (digital divides), while low PC penetration in India and China, and various forms of censorship and barriers keeping people away from cyberspace (like China) and hence hinder growth. More importantly, the major threat of the healthy embryonic growth of the cyberpower, towards an alternative form of political participation - TEA and democracy alike, is from the (self-)censorship and control regime, mostly adopted and adapted by undemocratic states in the region.

5.1   Censorship and Control the Internet

Singapore and China represent the control of the freedom of expression in and beyond the cyberspace. Despite the Singaporean state's fervent promotion of the Internet and attaching an "e" to virtually all aspects of life - as in e-commerce and e-government, e-politicking and e-political campaign are strictly regulated. The government will introduce separate rule (from the existing Broadcasting Law) for controlling the content of 'political' news (The Associate Press, 15 July 2001; Hong 2001); and the law was passed unopposed by the Parliament in mid-August 2001.

Strong political regime has a default on Internet control, China is no exception, though it is stepping towards the WTO platform for economic coupling with global market when widespread Internet access can capitalize on the economic potentials. The state limits the media's political effects by carefully circumscribing access to the Internet, as well as widespread access and content filtering, monitoring, deterrence, and self-censorship. China has been effectively limited use of the Internet to challenge the ruling regime: Beijing's complete ban of all forms of access to the Falun Gong's Webpages (Hong 2001; Kalathil and Boas 2001, Kalathil 2002).

On the other hand, Chinese government has also been successful in making extensive use of the Internet as a propaganda tool (promoting party line for socialism and nationalism) – attracting friendly international, supra-state organizations (like the UN family) into its territory, alongside with its promotion for economic development and tourism in cities of Beijing and Shanghai (cf. Wu 2001), as well as the e state's project for internationalisation: Olympic Game 2008 in Beijing.

For the heavy penalty and imprisonment serving to deter any possible politically incorrect activism, the INGOs like the Oxfam Greenpeace have to set up its Greater China's networking office next to mainland China and physically located in Hong Kong. The physical location of INGOs has been very much shaped by the friendliness of the state towards sometimes unwelcoming political engagements, in some instances, the flexibility of ICT might not help much because physical proximity still have some relevance for mobilization around territorial specific problem.

5.2   Censorship Not Effective in Long Run

Censorship is not effective and does not work in long run, the South Korea struggles against censorship and Taiwan's political liberalization experience confirm this (http://www.jinbo.net/; Hong 2001, Hsiao 1997). Though China shut down 2,000 Internet cafes in July 2001 ordered 6,000 to suspend operations and make changes (Reuter News 23 July, 2001), perhaps because of the state's control over the Internet, more anonymous cyber-cafes and cyber-stations are in operation which are enabling people to evade tough content laws. Contrasting to the widely held belief that the Net is more entertainment than politics, a study confirmed that users regard the Internet as a political instrument: in a quasi-authoritarian society, perhaps because of this political control, users regard the Internet as a political instrument, and 67% of

adult users agreed the Internet allows people the opportunity to comment on government policies. Moreover, more than 70% agreed the Internet allows people to "express their political views" and to learn about politics: Internet won out over other media as a forum to express opinions of any kind. These figures suggest the Internet will play a role in China's politics (South China Morning Post, 23 July 2001, http://technology.scmp.com/internet/ZZZHFD3J4PC.html).

>From what we have outlined above, it is more than obvious that in the differential control regime over the cyberspace in Asia, the Asian states' preferential choice for strategy to control, limit, contain and censor information flow and access reflect their political legitimacy question on the one hand, the extent of economic liberalization and their differential partial integration into the globalization project.

5.3 The Digital Divides

Digital deficiency and divide are problematic in Asia Pacific: the Internet backbone is still controlled by developed economies: 50% of the Internet communications among Asian countries are routed via US because infrastructure. The ratio of the Internet population in Asia Pacific and South East Asia compared with the total of the population in the above area is about 0.5%. East Asia is 0.4%. South Asia is 0.04%. OECD except US is 6.9% and US is 26.3%. (UNDP, 1999). The gap within Asian countries is also very deep: around 20% of the adults in the rich part of Asia are online but less than 1% of the people in the poor part using Internet (ITU, 2000). These figures confirm the digital divides inside and between countries in Asia: overwhelming majority, especially poor people in poor countries are the victims of globalization cannot receive the benefit of the Internet as their rich counterparts. Therefore, the problem of digital divides is serious and need to be addressed (Kenny et al. 2000).

Here, the appropriate use of ICT in social development is critical. Two recent reports recently released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) noted the important role of ICT in solving some of the social and economic ills of developing economies. The first report on the ICT chapter of the UNDP Annual Report (2001) noted that ICT can help to solve poverty worldwide. The second report, released in July 2001 under the Digital Opportunity Initiative of the G8 Dot Force thrust, further noted that ICT can help solve basic social ills involving sectors like health, education and the environment (http://itmatters.bworldonline.com/news/news_07242001b.html). How to build up linkages between ICT and better political governance hence more democratic is critical for sustainable development

6.   PUTTING (E-)MOBILIZATION IN GLOBAL WELFARE DOMAIN

Many cross-border welfare (human and labor rights) advocacies highlight the common political target

group – those having privileged positional goods but fail to perform certain ethical-morally sound and compatible functions, say, protecting the social vulnerable and the underprivileged groups when they pursue their goal for economic development. Transnational activism (TA) at this historical conjuncture serves as a powerful challenge/reminder for the supra-national bodies to abide the basic condition/morality for development (Rosenau 1997,1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Related to this, recent militant protests at the venues (the latest one is the G8 in Genoa, Italy, July 2001) of the EU, the G8, the IMF, the WTO, and World Bank summits have been forcefully articulating the fundamental contradictions between the haves and have-nots, and visualizing the exposing socio-economic fault-lines between the rich and poor, the developed and underdeveloped worlds. Operating at global level with local activism, these violent scenes have become routine at international summits of the rich and powerful supra-national agencies whom they control the global capital. Though it is highly questionable about the success of these 'anarchist like' campaigns (are these a new form of TWA manifestation?), vis-a-vis global capitalism, the actively engaging developmental debates on equitable share of benefits derived from the economic liberalization / globalization project – a forgotten, dark and tragic dimension of the champion of global capitalism – are rejuvenated through the TA in the post-Cold War ear (*The Economist*, 23rd June 2001, p.14).

Obviously, TWA also has a communicative aspect for facilitating the speak-up, act-out and alliance formation in socio-eco-movements by those being victimized by the mainstream pro-growth development model. Representing the victims, potential victims, as well as the advocacies for the nature at large, environmental NGOs have sharpen the demands for global sustanability. More specific, we should be reminded that on this path towards sustainability, the myths, symbolism and meaning – the proclaimed democracy, freedom of association and identity – attached to cyberspace are highly contingent, and the Net is in danger of becoming yet another instrument of cultural and political hegemony, creating social inequality and injustice (Ebo ed. 2001, Wyatt et al. 2000). How to cope with the differences and diversities, with trust, tolerance and acceptance will be the testing case for TWA.

6.1. Re-Positioning Asia in (E-)Democracy Perspective

Democracy and the information revolution are contingently attached (IDEA 2001, Waller et al. 2001). There are many symbolism/icons of Asia (under)development: a miracle but a headache for the World Bank and the IMF in the last decade, its idiosyncratic social underdevelopment, as well as the geopolitics driven socio-political, economic development trajectory (Lai and So 1997). But all said, democracy is mostly underdeveloped and in fact a precious positional goods that many governments attempt to limit and contain it, for the sake of their political survival. The cost of under-democratic is the seasonal instability and human tragedies, Jeffery Sachs (2001) rightly points out that, from a development perspective, democratic system is the important stability factor for socio-economic,

sustainable development globally. But the question is how to do it, by market force, the supra-national state or civic forces?

In Asia, there are varied forms of (un)democratic praxis, the one with the British legacy and a very structural one (like the India one, you can say, it is the full-fledge version of the Western democracy in Asia) and the one without much recognition for individual freedom of expression, not even the religious practice in public sphere (the Falun Gong in mainland China), the emerging largest Islamic democracy in Indonesia and the military authoritarian regime in Myanmar (Burma) and militant socialist North Korea. Democracy and political liberalization are as important as economic miracle for Asian societies. Given the rise of Asian digital power and the expansion of cyberspace, the intentional and strategic use of the Internet can foster TEA linkages and social capital building, across local, regional and global spaces, NGOs are becoming more receptive for idea to use the Net as political instrument than just a technical devise. When the attitudinal change is towards the political one, there is an emergence for politicking in and beyond the Net.

On the other hand, there are powerful forces to slow down the scope of TWA, Asian states are deeply divided along religious lines (Confucianism, Buddhism, Hindu, and Muslim), political ideologies (democracy, authoritarianism, and market socialism), colonial heritages (British, Japanese, and American), boundary disputes (between China and the Philippines, and between South Korea and Japan), and security tensions (Chinese military exercise in the Taiwan strait, and North Korean military alert with occasional 'Sun Shine' along the South Korea border); all these provide the pretext for the state's control over civil forces, exerting its hegemonic banner of nationalism and cultural-political correctness in and out of the cyberspace.

Furthermore, there are always supra-national institutional attempts to challenge local civic forces, like the economic liberalization calling from APEC and WTO. Subsequently, the prospect for global welfare though is bright, it will not be an unproblematic expansion on the way to full-fledged E-Democracy, say the least are the controlling mechanism, selective ICT setup to bar people's access, over the Net through both content and conduit models. Most likely, the Asian civic forces will be gradually integrated into some form of cellular TA, in and beyond the cyberspace, in the midst of conflict and rivalry with the Asian states.

6.2   The Quest for New Communicative Praxis

The logics of the Internet enhanced TWA is its opening-up process: communities and interest groups create and facilitate themselves. Here, we need to enable the deliberative skills (informational personality) people may possess, and look into about what actually happens in public debate spaces. The Net are instrumental in various stages of social mobilization, more often than not, individual's chat room or discussion list enables people to communicate and learning from each other – obviously, this is

the discovery of new knowledge and worldview on socio-environmental issues, and the building up of the group shared meaning (identity and supports) – all contribute to the capacity building process for TA agencies.

Yet, the engagement with the cyberspace should guard against the imperialist controls of the English language and the American cultural repercussions (Ebo 2001, Main 2001). Of the online language population totally 529 Million (December 2001), English accounts for 43%, and for East Asia: Japan (8.9%), Chinese (8.8%), Korean (4.6%) (source: http://www.glreach.com/globstats/). In terms of web page's language coverage, out of 313 billion Web page surveyed, English accounts for 68.4%, Japanese 5.9%, German 5.8%, Chinese3.9%, French3.0%, Spanish 2.4%, Russian 1.9%, Italian 1.6%, Portuguese1.4%, Korean 1.3% and Other 4.6% (Vilaweb.com, as quoted by eMarketer, Table 3). The domination of the English language in global communication brings about serious crisis to the existence of minority languages. Furthermore, the US style of life (cultural imperialism), and movie, comics and other visual popular culture, and the 'manufactured' news and documentaries (the US version of the War Against Terrorism represents such case), are cultural manifestation of the Western, global capitalism. As long as the Internet is based on existent social cultural structure, the Internet will reinforce such cultural imperialism (Ogura 2001).

6.3   Cyber-Activism towards Social E-quity and Justice

For the 20th Century, the predominant development model is a pro-growth and unstainable one, regardless of political ideologies, capitalist or socialist mode of governance over society and economy. But for the 21st Century, the real challenge for government and society in the post Cold War era is not just the economic crises but also socio-ecological sustainable development.

There is normative dimension for the development: equal opportunity, social justice and E-equity (Bucy and D'Angelo 1999). For obvious reasons, the realization of the Internet as a new form for democracy depends upon overcoming a number of problems, not least is the control of the public over ownership and access to airwaves and the information highway (Barnett,1997; Wright,1995; McChesney et al. 1998). Equitable ICT distribution cannot be handled exclusively by the market nor the state. In future, it should be the goal of NGOs and civic sector to ensure the universal access to the Internet and the mobilization of Netizens (Patterson and Wilson 2000). Critiques on the informational society highlight the contradictions of our 'new world' - the one is mostly mediated by ICT under global corporate governance (Luke, 2000; Menzies, 1996; NTIA, 2000). The present form of informatization of people's work and societal (-virtual) encounters has reinforced a divided-cum-dual society, the ICT rich minority over those being controlled by the ICT - the so-called *Dual City* phenomenon: the informational-based formal economy is juxtaposed by a down-graded labor-based informal economy resulting in a spatial structure: a city that combines segregation, diversity, and hierarchy (Castells 1996,

2000). Obviously, there is an urgent need to call for normative development agenda for the humanization of the informational society and global welfare: equity, participation and social justice in the system of global/local governance.

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