Digital Technology and Sharing: Technological and Social Perspectives

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Sharing is now pervasive in the Cyberspace with a variety of objects: information, software, photos, music, movies and a lot more. Using the sharing phenomenon in the cyberspace as a case, we seek to illustrate the reciprocal impacts of scientific and technological development and social life and how these issues could be discussed in a general education setting. In the first part we will review several interesting examples of online sharing, including user-produced add-on applications in a PC gaming community, sharing in peer-to-peer networks, and the open-source software movement. In the second part we will examine several perspectives on the phenomenon: technological, economics and sociological. Our objective is not so much to evaluate the relative merits or limitations of each perspective but to highlight how the advance of digital technology challenges our existing assumptions and organizations of social life, especially the individualistic and commodified relationshps in a market society. This requires a broad-based understanding both in the academia and more importantly by our students beyond the narrow confines of single disciplines and orientations.

Our students are by all means well acquainted with digital applications and various forms of cyber communities. Yet their participations may not provoke a humanistic understanding of the advances in science and technology and their impacts on the formation and organization of the information society. We hope our brief presentation will shed light on the needs to and the promises in bridging the humanities and sciences for our undergraduate students through the general education programme.