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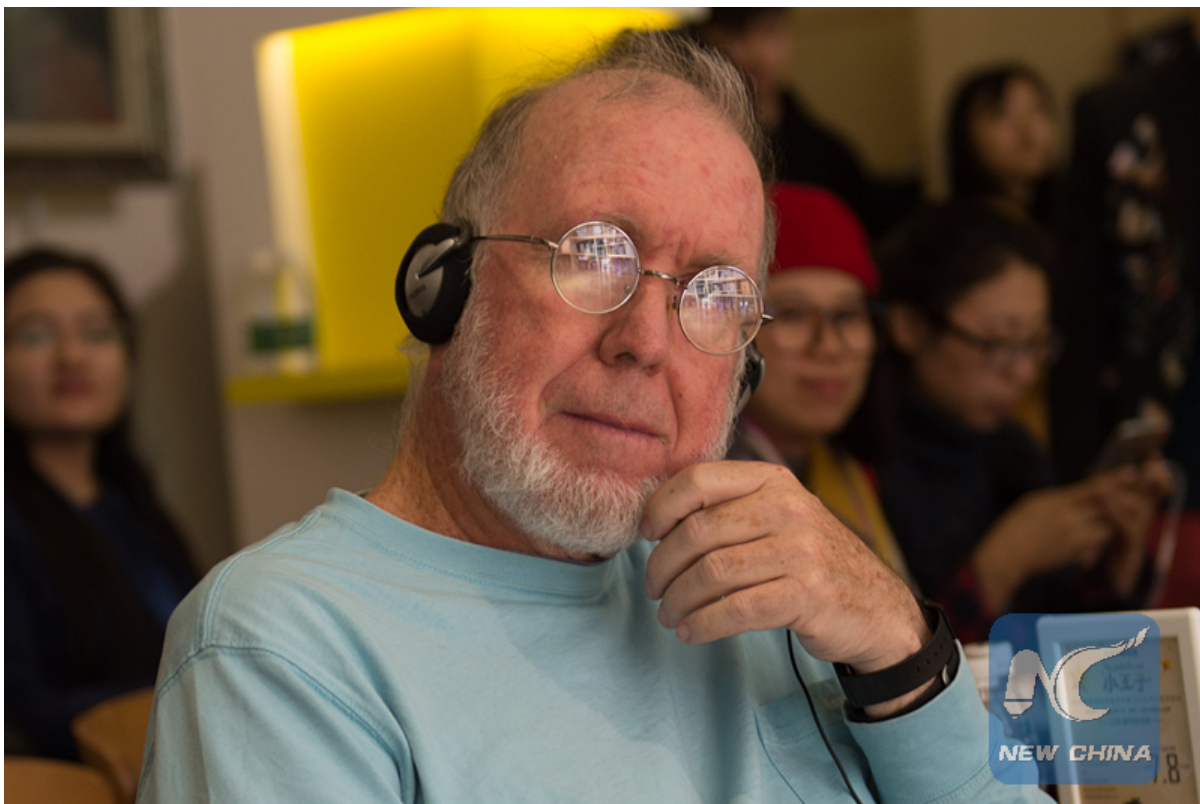New China　　　　Top News　　　　Latest News　　　　Photos　　　　Video

Kevin Kelly: the best technology in the future is invisible

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Kevin Kelly at Yanjiyou Bookstore in Beijing's Zhongguancun District, Oct. 26, 2015. (Xinhua/Wu Kaixiang)

By Xinhua writers Shen Anni and Ji Shaoting

BEIJING, Nov. 4 (Xinhua) -- Kevin Kelly's appearance belies his authorship of mind-expanding books: he is white-haired, plainly dressed, and soft-spoken.

The 63-year-old founding executive editor of Wired magazine is curious about everything like a child. Walking on the streets of Zhongguancun, one of Beijing's largest IT centers, he took a picture of the front of a dumpling restaurant. Then he was amazed by the historically decorated restaurant he was about to go in. A lad in a Qing Dynasty-style costume was guiding cars to park in front of the doorway. "He is just like a robot," Kelly laughs. "It is unbelievable to have such places in Zhongguancun. This is what the future looks like, the old and the new mixed together."

He elaborates on his view of the future in his new book, "The Silver Cord", which he is promoting in China. This graphic novel is his first comic science fiction. "This is a story about what happens when robots have souls," Kelly says. He is also here for the launch of his book "The Inevitable" in Chinese, which is published earlier than any other language.

Kelly has more fans in China than in the United States, but not because China has a larger population. "When my book 'Out of Control' was published in the U.S. in 1994, few people could understand it. But when it was published in China in 2010, more people began to understand it."

"The Fifth Element" and "Blade Runner" are his favorite movies because they combine the past with the future. "We tend to think that everything in the future is brand new and modern," he says, "but I think the future is new stuff and old stuff mixed together in many layers."

Pointing at the bicycles parked along the sidewalk, he says "Look at them, the bicycles, motors and cars, they will still be there in the future, with vehicles flying above them."

SUPER ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

He sees artificial intelligence (AI) is the most important thing in the next 20 years. But he is confident it will not control mankind, nor will it have self-awareness like human beings.

"There will be many varieties of self-awareness," he says, "and it turns out even chimpanzees and gorillas have a little tiny bit of self-awareness." He believes there will be many different AI "species" - all of them different to human intelligence, but each smarter than humans in one dimension.

Asked if he has any advice for AI companies, he says, "Hurry up! I don't think anything that cannot be done right now."

As for specifics, he insists that cars be given some ethics. He raises an example: a car cannot stop, but it has to decide between running over one person or five people. "It is difficult for human to choose, let alone a car," he says."(Isaac) Asimov proposed 'Three Laws of Robotics' , but it is far from enough." He believes a car needs thousands or even more ethical rules before it can make a decision.

Asked if he would upload his consciousness, he responds immediately: "I have to know the cost. Do I lose anything? Do I have to die early? At what age should I upload my consciousness? Where will I be uploaded? There are 100 questions that I have to know before I could answer that question."

If he were a super AI, he would merge with all human intelligence and become a superior AI. "Come on, human beings, join me, marry me," he laughs like kid.

INVISIBLE TECHNOLOGY

AIs will become services on the cloud and intelligence will be sold, he believes. Everybody will pay and use them for life or business.

He rails against the current reliance on mobile phones. "Your phone keeps yelling 'Look at me!' " he says. "New applications attract your attention and you just cannot tear yourself away from them."

The fact that so much work is done on phones proves they are not intelligent enough, he argues. The best technology in the future is invisible. "Things that draw your attention are not good enough," he says. "It' s just like electricity."

When electricity was first harnessed, it was unusual and people would marvel at an electric light. "How wonderful it is!" But then it became invisible and we just take it for granted until it goes off, he explains.

Kelly wears a watch and a smart bracelet - the two smartest gadgets on him. He does not always carry his mobile phone so a smart bracelet is a better step counter and health recorder.

He once attended an activity named "Quantize Myself" and was asked to upload as much of his data as possible. He was inspired to think of a future when customized advertisements are everywhere; when medicines made according to your data will be delivered after being printed by 3D printer.

He believes in the future: "what can be measured will be measured" and "what can be shared will be shared." And all these technologies will be invisible.

"Just like screens," he says. "They will be ubiquitous. Everything, even a page of a book, can be a screen."