

Rethinking the regulation of risky technologies within global regulatory regimes and dynamic local contexts

Regulation remains an important device for controlling the environmental, human health and social risks of technologies, however, internationally harmonised regulatory regimes struggle with informal local practices as well as dynamic, complex and diverse socio-technical contexts of implementation. In transitional China, the move to a market economy has resulted in changes that further increase the complexity of technology production, regulation and use. In our paper, we report on empirical fieldwork that has investigated the regulation of transgenic Bt cotton and modern antibiotics in Hubei and Shandong, China. By employing a “backward mapping methodology”, we compare the framing of risks associated with these technologies by users (farmers and patients in poorer communities) with the framings adopted by international regulatory regimes. The paper illustrates the complexities involved in reconciling global and local risk framings, and investigates possibility of rethinking regulation in a way that is more sensitive to the perspectives and needs of poorer communities.

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