

TAILORING BIOTECHNOLOGIES KYOTO CONFERENCE 2007

## Reconstructing Agro-biotechnologies for Development?

NOVEMBER 3 - 4, 2007, KYOTO, JAPAN

~~~~~  
Organized by THE CENTRE FOR TAILORING BIOTECHNOLOGIES AND GENOMICS, WAGENINGEN, NL

Sponsored by THE KYOTO UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION, KYOTO, JP

### CALL FOR PAPERS:

The pro-anti biotech debate is dominated by a specific group of participants which may be called *the splitters*. These splitters separate biotechnology from its social context and consider biotechnology as just a group of techniques. Whenever splitters discuss the social, this social domain is located outside the technologies. The splitters are divided in two subgroups, the optimistic and the pessimistic, those who think that biotechnology might solve all problems and those who emphasize its negative impacts. Both the supporters and opponents start from the same basic assumption that technology and society are separate domains, and the object of analysis is the impacts of a specific factor (biotechnology) on a generalized and abstract institution or process (society), confirming that technology is essentially a-social. Both types of splitters also focus on the identification of agro-industrial biotechnology with its most spectacular form, transgenetics. All other kinds of traditional, modern and hybrid forms of biotechnologies are neglected, confirming the hegemonic position of transgenetics. The aim of this conference is *to go beyond the pro-anti debate* on narrowly identified and a-social biotechnology. In this conference, the social shaping of agricultural biotechnologies will be a key-issue and thus how 'impacts' are embedded in the technology itself will be analyzed. Main concern, however, is to discuss the possibility to *reappropriate* (the mode of) technology development, and *reconstruct* technologies for the benefit of the rural poor.

The conference's perspective implies that we need to open the black box of technology development and go inside. The idea that technologies are products of agency and knowledge systems developed within particular social contexts is the object of study of "science and technology studies" and "social constructivism", among others, and now commonly shared. The analysis of technology within the context of uneven and contradictory power relations and the possibility of appropriation and democratization is an important issue in "critical theory" and "political economy". Furthermore, as any type of agricultural technologies is embedded in agrarian realities, we can rely on the contribution from "rural sociology" and "agricultural economics" to understand the actual as well as potential contexts of development and

application of technologies. These critical social sciences provide us with diverse analytical points of view, but at least three cross-sections can be applied to our common interests: spatial, social and epistemological aspects of reconstructing agro-biotechnologies.

- **Social aspects** – This sub-theme is about the act of refusing to accept technology (*rejection*); the act of opposing technologies that are disapproved of but still imposed by the dominant (*resistance*); the act of organizing restrictions and procedures (*regulation*); and the act of developing new and different kinds of technologies (*redesign*). Despite their different emphases, these four acts, which may compose the social aspects of reconstruction process of technology, are also closely interrelated. The act of redesigning current agro-industrial biotechnologies in the movement to tailor-made biotechnologies implies the act of rejecting the actual form of biotechnology design as well as that of resisting the existing unequal power relations which are integrated in the design of biotechnologies as things stand. In this sub-theme the reconstruction of agro-biotechnologies is discussed in relation to acts of, and socio-political struggles for, rejection, resistance, regulation and redesign.
- **Spatial aspects** – In this sub-theme technology is conceived as a series of practices that design and remake social spaces. The subject here is the technological making of modern spaces. It may be analyzed i) how spaces are conceptualised in agro-biotechnologies, and ii) how these agro-biotechnological regimes both rearrange existing social spaces and produce new ones. An important proposition is that contemporary biotechnology reduces space to an abstract (*global*) entity. The issue of appropriation and reconstruction however also poses the question how space (*locality*) is becoming a relevant point of reference in technology development. In this sub-theme the reconstruction of agro-biotechnologies is discussed in relation to practices of relocating technologies in new social spaces.
- **Techno-epistemological aspects** – Epistemology, broadly defined as the study and theory of the origin, nature, methods and limits of knowledge, is mainly concerned with propositional knowledge (that something is true), and not so much with the question of how to do something (normative and practical). While *classical epistemology* such as “philosophy of science” has presupposed an idealized conception of knowledge, *social epistemology* such as “science and technology studies”, on the contrary, regards knowledge not as the product of the mind, but as the product of social interactions. The latter, on which our premise is based, is the study of knowledge in its social context. In this sub-theme the reconstruction of agro-biotechnologies is discussed in relation to the epistemological question of how and what social forces contribute to the emergence and shaping of certain forms of knowledge and technology.

The conference will be conducted in a semi-closed workshop format with all papers distributed to participants in advance. Some papers will be arranged by the conference organizers, but we also welcome both faculty members and PhD students to submit papers. The results of the

conference will be made available on Tailoring Biotechnologies website, and selected papers will be published in an edited issue of the journal of Tailoring Biotechnologies.

Abstracts of contributed papers are due on **June 1, 2007** (abstracts should be 400 words or less). Authors will be notified of paper acceptance by e-mail before **July 1, 2007** (In case of acceptance by the conference organizers, authors will receive instructions for preparing the full text of their papers to be published in the proceedings, and also for arranging and coordinating the visit and stay in Kyoto). Authors will be required to send their full papers before **September 15, 2007**.

Finally, we hope you take time to enjoy the historical city of Kyoto, which, over a period of 1,200 years, dating from the decision to move Japan's capital to Kyoto in 794, has nurtured a splendid, delicate and unique kind of culture, and is considered the mother of culture within Japan so you can find many aspects of characteristic Japanese culture thriving in Kyoto.

#### INFORMATION:

**Location** – The conference will be held at the Graduate School of Economics, Kyoto University.

**Accommodation** – Accommodation will be reserved at the Kyoto University's guest house and nearby hotels. The conference organizers will cover participants' accommodation. Participants are free to arrange their own accommodation, which will not be covered by the organizers.


**Language** – The official language of the conference is English.

**Registration** – Those who want to participate in the conference without contributing their papers are required to send e-mail to the organizers before **August 1, 2007**. In case of arranging the visit and stay in Kyoto by themselves, the deadline for registration is **October 1, 2007**. No registration fee. Limited travel subsidies will be available.

**Social programmes and excursion** – Social programmes for participants (and accompanying persons) are planned. Excursion will also be arranged to show the highlights as well as rural agriculture in Kyoto. Actual expenses have to be paid by participants. Detail information will be available at the website of Tailoring Biotechnologies.

**Access** – Kyoto is located in Kansai (Kinki) region, 70~80 minutes from Kansai Airport by JR "Haruka" Kansai Airport Limited Express, and 2 hours and 22 minutes from Tokyo Station by the JR "Nozomi"





Shinkansen (Bullet Train). From Kyoto JR Station to Kyoto University, you can take a taxi or city bus (#206 or #17). The taxi ride will take about 20 minute and cost about 1,800 yen. The bus ride will take about 30-35 minutes and cost 230 yen. Graduate School of Economics is at the centre of Yoshida Main Campus (<http://www.kyoto-u.ac.jp/english/etop2/e07-top.htm>).

**Further information and enquiries** – Updated detail information will be available at the website of Tailoring Biotechnologies (<http://www.tailoringbiotechnologies.com>). Questions regarding the conference can be e-mailed to the organizers: [Joost.Jongerden@wur.nl](mailto:Joost.Jongerden@wur.nl) for scientific programmes, and [hisano@econ.kyoto-u.ac.jp](mailto:hisano@econ.kyoto-u.ac.jp) for social programmes and local information.

#### **THE CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS:**

**Guido Ruivenkamp**, Professor at Critical Technology Construction Group of Wageningen University & Research Centre, and the Athena Institute of Vrije University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**Joost Jongerden**, Assistant Professor at Critical Technology Construction Group of Wageningen University & Research Centre, and the Athena Institute of Vrije University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**Shuji Hisano**, Associate Professor of Political Economy of Food and Agriculture, Graduate School of Economics, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan