

# Human Costs of Gadgets:

## *Causation and Perception in the Social Controversies over Global High-tech Electronics Industry*

因果與感知：兩個關於全球化高科技電子工業的社會爭議動態之比較

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### **Abstract**

Contrasting two cases of social controversy over global high-tech electronics industry, the Apple/Foxconn controversy in China starting in 2010 and the ongoing RCA campaign in Taiwan since the 1990s, this article explores how scientific knowledge claims and public opinions are used as contested grounds.

Sharing inter-related historical contexts of mass production and consumption of high-tech gadgets, fragmented assembly-line jobs for young women from the countryside, constant flight of the capital in search of cheap labor, and huge disparities between the coolness of the gadget and cruelty for people making it, these two cases played out in very different fashions. Apple/Foxconn is highly publicized, sensational, and appealing to public sensibilities, as the publicity generated by brand-name companies is often used by anti-sweatshop campaigns to pressure them into addressing labor abuses in their supply chains. By contrast, the long-running RCA controversy produces few news-worthy events, fighting mainly in science and the court of law—two historically constituted epistemic authorities valuing rational demeanor and having aversion for emotions. These two cases may be examples of the two extremes of the patterns through which contemporary social-technical controversies play out.

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