

KECK, Frédéric. 2020.
Avian Reservoirs: Virus
Hunters and Birdwatchers
in Chinese Sentinel Posts.
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I MARTHA LINCOLN

is Assistant Professor of cultural and medical anthropology at San Francisco State University and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*. San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132, United States (mlincoln@sfsu.edu).

Frédéric Keck's *Avian Reservoirs: Virus Hunters and Birdwatchers in Chinese Sentinel Posts* was published in January 2020 – a moment that could hardly have been more timely for the release of a work contemplating the governance of emerging infectious diseases across national systems of public health and epidemiology. Indeed, this timeliness might make it challenging to approach this volume on its own merits, given its many points of resonance with the events that have unfolded in global health since the moment it hit print.

Yet, *Avian Reservoirs* in fact provides such a nuanced, rich, and complex account of its topics – human/animal relations and the management of emerging zoonotic disease in bird populations specifically – that it may *not* immediately reward a reader seeking to shed light on the experience of Covid-19 in Asia or beyond. In preparing this project, the author carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore between 2007 and 2013 – well before the appearance of the novel coronavirus, and a period in which the experience of SARS in 2003 continued to inform and condition national preparedness efforts for a possible future outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza. The author's multifarious field experiences took place in Hong Kong among virologists, microbiologists, poultry farmers, and Buddhist groups; among birdwatchers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore; with biologists and bioinformatics experts in Singapore and Hong Kong; with members of the Animal Health Research Institute and animal welfare advocates in Taiwan; and with microbiologists and museum professionals in Europe. Keck also observed avian influenza preparedness exercises in Singapore and outbreak field exercises in Hong Kong. Throughout the text, his perspective on the book's orienting question – “What does it mean to practice preparedness at the animal level?” (p. 3) – is informed by the perspectives of these highly diverse subject-matter experts across Asian (and other) locales.

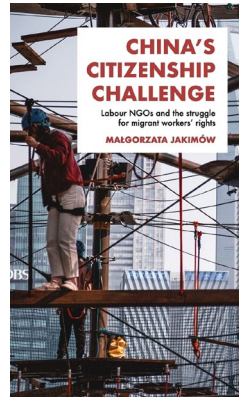
While this question could be answered in a rather programmatic or even technocratic fashion, drawing on a straightforward assessment of national and international initiatives to secure human and animal populations against emerging viruses, *Avian Reservoirs* develops a set of alternative theoretical stakes in its explorations. Keck is a sociocultural anthropologist trained in the structuralist tradition – a paradigm that once dominated the discipline but has since been overshadowed by a poststructuralist revolution and a series of “turns” in the field's overarching theoretical program. Drawing on this admittedly somewhat antiquated theoretical apparatus, Keck argues for a philosophical distinction between modes of avian influenza surveillance and management practices that he calls “pastoralist” and those that he calls “cynthetic” (or related to hunting). He subsequently develops book-level arguments around this and a suite of other binary oppositions. For example, in Part One of the book, Keck draws a distinction between modes of pandemic management that he terms “preparedness” and “prevention” – contrasting a style of disease control that is informed by statistical definition and control of populations with an approach that involves “the imaginary enactment of disasters (...) where humans take the perspective of nonhumans” (p. 7). While the payoff of making such distinctions may not be immediately obvious – especially to a reader unfamiliar with the canon of structuralist anthropological thought – over the course of the volume, Keck's case for this approach to analysing human-animal-microbe relations is often persuasive, and it entails insights that are both clever and illuminating.

The book's first part, “Animal Diseases,” is devoted to a set of relatively theoretical excursions drawing on the history and philosophy of science. In Chapter One, “Culling, Vaccinating, and Monitoring Contagious Animals,” the author embarks on an unusual genealogical undertaking, tracing animal diseases and their control as an evolving theme in the history of anthropological literature. Chapter Two, “Biosecurity Concerns and the Surveillance of Zoonoses,” introduces the concept of “virus hunters” in microbiology, providing a close analysis of the semiotics of that practice. Chapter Three, “Global Health and the Ecologies of Conservation,” draws parallels between the practices of collecting virus samples in avian influenza research and museological practices of collection, curation, and classification.

Asian studies specialists will find the latter half of the volume, called “Techniques of Preparedness,” especially rewarding – it presents a series of densely detailed ethnographic vignettes and case studies from three Asian nations whose public spheres, civil society, and scientific and health apparatus are shaped by political tensions with mainland China. In Chapter Four, “Sentinels and Early Warning Signals,” the author develops a discussion of the use of birds – wild and domestic – as sentinels in the early detection of threats to human health. Cutting across multiple field sites and technical domains, this chapter's level of ethnographic attentiveness and analytic creativity – not to mention its attunement to the political conundrums of the region – are remarkable. Chapter Five, “Simulations and Reverse Scenarios,” examines practices of simulation in pandemic preparedness, considering this technique in terms of “performance, ritual, and play from the perspective of hunting societies” (p. 109). Here, too, Keck's ethnographic account

is intriguing – presenting a set of dualistic oppositions that mark the “desktop simulations” and “real-ground exercises” that are commonly practiced by states and health agencies. In Chapter Six, “Stockpiling and Storage,” the author explores one last measure that attempts to contain the threat of future pandemic: the practice of accumulating vaccines and other treatments, as well as the storage and circulation of viral strains themselves.

Avian Reservoirs is a highly creative and unorthodox work, richly informed by interdisciplinary concepts that are folded into the text with care and intellectual fidelity. The book’s experimental quality is to be appreciated. However, in some areas, the text is also somewhat cryptic – partially preventing the reader from assessing what the author’s premises amount to, what his arguments truly entail, and whether he has proven his claims. Too, some of Keck’s case studies – while potentially felicitous – have something of the appearance of being cherry-picked or promiscuously chosen, owing to the lack of a more explicit discussion of the author’s methods and motivations. Yet, despite the textual puzzles it presents, *Avian Reservoirs* is a thought-provoking read – imposing order and orientation over disparate, highly charged, and locally varying projects to manage the entanglements between humans, animals, and emerging pathogens.



JAKIMÓW, Malgorzata. 2021.
China's Citizenship Challenge: Labour NGOs and the Struggle for Migrant Workers' Rights.
 Manchester: Manchester University Press.

I PAOLA PASQUALI

is an adjunct professor at Webster University Ghana, International Relations Department, 445B Luanda Close, East Legon, Accra, Ghana (paolapasquali@webster.edu).

Ever since their appearance in the mid-1990s, labour NGOs in China have been walking a thin line between activism and the Party-state lines’ boundaries. These boundaries have narrowed over the last few years, especially since the 2017 promulgation of the Overseas NGOs Management Law, which prohibits them from seeking financial support from abroad.

The literature on Chinese labour NGOs often frames their activities in terms of class struggle. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, this book argues that Chinese labour NGOs’ activities are more than just that, for worker activists are also migrants in Chinese cities, and their activism is linked to their legal status, as well as the marginalisation they experience in cities. The latter is premised on the household registration (*hukou* 户口) system, which allocates rural migrants in cities to a second-class citizens status that bars them from access to social rights. This condition is topped up by popular discourses describing migrant workers as low “quality” (*suzhi* 素质). The book posits that the key unifying factor behind the condition of Chinese migrant workers is more fundamentally the question of citizenship. In order to address the marginalisation and hardships faced by migrant workers in megacities, the book argues, labour NGOs’ activism in China must also address, and often challenge, “the established idea of who a citizen is, what a citizen can do and who defines citizenship” (p. 5). The book draws on the “act of citizenship” theoretical framework developed by Engin Isin and others (Isin and Nielsen 2008) in the European context – with a bit of a twist – to look at migrant labour activism in the context of China’s Party-state.

Chapter Two argues that given the constraints governing who can form a labour NGO in China, the act of creating and running one by what is considered as an underclass of migrant workers pushes the boundaries of established practices of citizenship, for it challenges the idea that politics is a prerogative of the educated class. Jakimów describes “resistance through accommodation” strategies, such as framing demands in the official language, registering organisations as businesses instead of NGOs, and fostering good relations with local governments. As we read in Chapter Three, actions such as