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Virulent Zones: Animal Disease and Global Health at China's Pandemic Epicenter, from Flu to Covid-19

Where and how did the Covid-19 pandemic begin? How and why did the novel coronavirus 'spillover' from animals to humans? Answers to these questions remain disputed and controversial, with wild accounts of the possible role of "wet markets" and "bat soup" dueling with even more explosive conspiracy theories about laboratory accidents and cover-ups. Rather than providing my own answers to these questions, this paper instead looks at how and why questions about the "epicenter" or "source" of pandemics became scientifically and politically central to global health in China. Drawing on research discussed in my recent book on the effort by global agencies to contain influenza pandemics at their hypothetical "source," I trace how China became marked out as a pandemic hot spot in global health due to its diverse and intensively farmed human-animal relations. Following scientists as they moved from labs to field sites, crossing geopolitical borders and interrogating ecological zones, I argue that a focus on viral *containment* "at source" often reflected an absence of care for the human-animal worlds found there. As a result, while global health has become adept at predicting and localizing probable sources of zoonotic spillover—including, notably, the prediction that a bat coronavirus would emerge in China—global programs of viral discovery unfortunately remain less successful at preventing spillover from occurring. By tracking some of the minor field displacements that challenged laboratory experts in influenza research, I chart out how the prevention of the next pandemic could demand shifting the attention of global health from *sources* to *suitability*, and from viruses to zones of virulence.



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DETAILS



ONLINE
WEBINAR

Date: 11 November 2020,
Wednesday

Time: 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

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Register at Zoom:



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