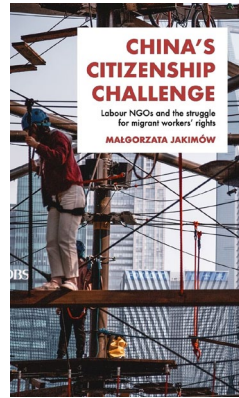


is intriguing – presenting a set of dualistic oppositions that mark the “desktop simulations” and “real-ground exercises” that are commonly practiced by states and health agencies. In Chapter Six, “Stockpiling and Storage,” the author explores one last measure that attempts to contain the threat of future 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

networking with foreign donors and other labour NGOs, considered commonplace in democratic systems, are potentially transformational of the existing citizenship framework, for they challenge the prescribed atomisation of NGOs and the prohibition of seeking foreign funds. Chapter Four explores NGOs' "civil rights" (*weiquan* 維權) activism, most commonly directed at fighting deferred and/or unlawfully low wages. Labour NGOs in this context act as mediators, arbitrators, and, though rarely, as litigators with employers (being normally not allowed in court for legal representation). Although migrants are often passive in these negotiations, the book argues that these activities go beyond mere labour activism, conferring migrant workers with access to justice, and thus potentially transforming the citizenship regime in the process. Chapter Five discusses labour activism beyond the law, which includes protests, strikes, petitions, and so on. The author argues that while such activities are regular means of advancing claims in other parts of the world, these are also the ones that are possibly least effective in the context of China's Party-state. This is because they will normally attract stern repression from the authorities and will have long-term repercussions on the capacity of acting of those who carried them out. As a result, they are often considered taboo by labour NGOs, or alternatively, as desperate acts of last resort, when legal means cannot be mobilised.

The last two chapters focus on how migrants challenge and transform the material and discursive space(s) underpinning Chinese citizenship. Chapter Six looks at how NGOs and individual migrants voice, challenge, and transform the existing discourse on migrants as low quality as well as the notion that they do not belong to the city (through plays, festivals, publications, poetry, songs, blogs, and so on). Chapter Seven accounts for how these NGOs cope with migrants' marginalisation in cities by both "integrating" into the city and "claiming" the right to the city. While the former act is often ambiguously intertwined with state-prescribed visions of integration, more daring acts of "claiming" the right to the city include resistance to demolitions of migrant urban villages, setting up of schools for migrant children, and collecting money for the hospitalisation of migrant workers in need.

The citizenship acts illustrated in this last chapter may strike the reader as very powerful or very weak: powerful, if viewed from the perspective of how these organisations change the lived experiences of migrant workers in cities, but also weak, in that these actions replace the state in the provision of services such as education or healthcare and do not question existing governance as such. This is a theme that runs throughout the book: on the one hand, what are described as citizenship acts are transformative of what it means to be a Chinese citizen today. On the other, they are primarily intended to lead migrant workers' grievances into legal mechanisms, and encourage negotiation rather than advocating for outright resistance or change of political rule. Jakimów argues that in fact, NGOs' activism might even facilitate the state's aims for social control and the maintenance of stability. The author leaves somewhat suspended the issue of whether acts of citizenship are always and equally transformative of existing notions of Chinese citizenship. The idea of "resistance through accommodation" appears a somewhat weaker strategy than the space activism described in the last chapter. The latter also speaks to a popular strand of Western political theory, associated with Henri Lefebvre and the notion of a "right to the

city" (Lefebvre 1996). Scholars and students of citizenship and migration will find in this book refreshing additions and cues to broaden too often Euro-centred theories of citizenship, migration, and political emancipation. The book further raises the issue of whether resistance through accommodation is really a prerogative of authoritarian states. This book is also a must-read for scholars and students of China, for it innovatively connects the dots between topics (labour activism, citizenship, *hukou*, *suzhi*, and migrants in cities) often treated in separate compartments in China area studies. For non-Chinese scholars and students of China, it further stands as a methodological reminder of how topics such as labour activism are always at risk of being approached without too much examination of the researcher's preconceptions. The book shows that for Chinese labour activists, direct resistance is often counterproductive, and activism must instead be a job in the interstices, whether through networking, negotiating within the law, or in everyday practices. To many outsiders of the Chinese context, this may not appear as impactful as outright protesting, or going on strike. Yet, Chinese labour activists' acts connect with dilemmas that political activists are faced with everywhere in the world: are things better changed from within the system or by opposing it? Should it be all or nothing, or is it a little better than nothing? While these dilemmas are universal, the Chinese case vividly illustrated in this book makes these questions as compelling as ever.

References

- ISIN, Engin F., and Greg M. NIELSEN (eds.). 2008. *Acts of Citizenship*. London: Zed Books.
- LEFEBVRE, Henri. 1996. *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.