

The Emergence of Civilizational Consciousness in Early China: History Word by Word. By Uffe Bergeton. London: Routledge, 2019, 227 pp.

Uffe Bergeton's book starts with the promise to trace when "civilizational consciousness" first emerged in China (p. 1). By "civilizational consciousness" Bergeton refers to "a collectively shared awareness of belonging to a 'civilization' (defined by shared practices and values)" (p. 3). This topic had been explored in the past by Poo Mu-chou in his *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia and China*.¹ Bergeton distinguishes his book from Poo's on two points: first, he is set to provide a more systematic discussion of "a broader range of terms used to articulate early Chinese concepts of 'culture' or 'civilization,'" and second, he argues that distinct civilizational consciousness emerged in China "a few centuries" after the date proposed by Poo (who traced it to the Western Zhou period [西周, ca. 1046-771 BCE]) (p. 2). Bergeton further promises to "provide a novel theoretical framework for the study of collective civilizational consciousness," and to demonstrate that this consciousness emerged thanks to the efforts of "a small group of masters of statecraft and moral philosophy in China around the middle of the first millennium BCE" (p. 3).

Once the reader delves into the book, it quickly turns out that the book's essence is encapsulated in Bergeton's subtitle: "History Word by Word." As explained in Chapter 1, the author attempts to analyze China's emerging civilizational consciousness from the perspective of its "lexicalization." Borrowing from the arsenal of German "conceptual history" (*Begriffsgeschichte*), Bergeton traces the evolution of several keywords, most notably *wen* 文 (chapters 2-3), the semantic trajectory of which resembles, in his eyes, aspects of the evolution of the word "civilization" in modern Europe. Two other chapters trace the changing terminology applied to alien peoples ("from 'belligerent others' to 'civilizationally inferior others'"; chapter 4), and the semantic layers of Chinese autonym (*Xia* 夏) as related to the emerging discourse of "elegance" versus "vulgar customs" (*su* 俗) (chapter 5). Overall, the discussion is decidedly focused on the changing usage of a few specific terms. Political, social, and intellectual history is mentioned, if at all, only to highlight parallels with the evolution of the civilizational discourse in the West. The result is indeed "history word by word."

Bergeton deserves much credit for selecting an interesting and highly important topic for his research and for developing a novel theoretical perspective. His discussion contains not a few astute observations, both insofar as parallels between the histories of Chinese and Western civilizational discourse are concerned, and in a narrower context of highlighting such topics as an overlooked neglect of the concept of *wen* in *Mengzi* 孟子 (pp. 118-121), and providing engaging linguistic analysis of the terms *Xia* 夏 and *su* 俗 (chapter 5). Yet overall, the book is disappointing. It

¹ Poo Mu-chou, *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia and China* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2005).

suffers from a series of severe methodological weaknesses, such as problematic selection of terms to be explored, lack of clarity with regard to the dating of some of the texts under discussion, lack of attention to important nuances of China's pre-imperial history, and the like. Overall, in my eyes, these flaws not only strongly undermine the appeal of Bergeton's book as a whole but also serve to demonstrate the general inadequacy of the conceptual history framework for studies of major historical phenomena.

Let me start with the last point. Bergeton's reduction of the complex phenomenon of China's emerging civilizational consciousness to its lexicalization is untenable, insofar as it substitutes a part for a whole. To be sure, changing usage of specific keywords may serve as an excellent indicator of certain intellectual developments, but it can never encompass these developments in their full complexity. Thus, it would be a gross mistake to reduce the study of China's ritual system and ritual thought to a single keyword *li* 禮, or to reduce studies of Chinese legal culture to the term *fa* 法, or to analyze Chinese views of loyalty through a single term *zhong* 忠. Each of these terms may provide an excellent introduction to the topic under discussion, but no more than an introduction. This is doubly so when we deal with an even more complex phenomenon of civilizational consciousness, with which no single keyword—including *wen* 文—can be readily associated. And it is triply so when the discussion purports to encompass the Western Zhou period, from which we have only a tiny textual corpus that does not suffice to trace early stages of the phenomenon's lexicalization.

Let me demonstrate this point with a single example. From archeological studies we know that China's aristocratic elites of the Western Zhou to the Springs-and-Autumns (Chunqiu 春秋, 770-453 BCE) periods maintained a common ritual system. This system is observable from the commonalities in the shape and size of the aristocrats' tombs, in their mortuary assemblages, in the inscriptions on bronze vessels, and, most importantly, in the highly visible correlation between one's rank and the size and the furnishing of one's tomb. This ritual system was in all likelihood a product of what Lothar von Falkenhausen dubs a "ritual reform" of the mid-to-late Western Zhou period. That this reform—which is unequivocally observable in the elite burials throughout the Zhou world—is not attested in any of the existing texts suffices to caution us against over-reliance on textual evidence when dealing with the complexities of early Zhou history.² That a phenomenon is not lexicalized does not mean that it did not occur.

²) For the archeological evidence of the Western Zhou ritual reform and for the functioning of the ensuing ritual system, see the indispensable study of Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1050-250 BC): The Archeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, 2006). For more on the correlations between the elite tombs' size, shape, and ritual furnishing, see also Yin Qun 印群, *Huanghe zhongxiayou diqu de Dong Zhou muzang zhidu* 黄河中下游地区的东周墓葬制度 (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001).

The emergence and functioning of this ritual system is of course highly relevant to Bergeton's topic of the emergence of civilizational consciousness. That rituals "were a highly conspicuous part of everyday life which governed how people of different social rank should behave toward each other" is readily recognized by the author (p. 98). However, what he misses entirely is how this ritualized culture, which encompassed the elite throughout the Zhou realm—and the Zhou elite only—served as a marker of belonging to a distinct civilization that separated the Zhou nobles from both uncouth commoners and, even more notably, from the outlying "barbarians" who did not take part in the shared ritual culture. Since I have addressed this topic specifically in a separate study, which is frequently cited by Bergeton, I do not wish to discuss the matter in depth here.³ What I would like to point out is that, first, in searching for keywords that determined China's civilizational consciousness, Bergeton should have given the term *li* 禮 at the very least the same weight as *wen*, and, second, that in exploring the importance of ritual culture as the major civilizational marker he should have gone beyond the specific term *li* to a much broader ritual-related discourse. Take for instance the following passage from the *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語), in which the Zhou king berates a visiting Jin 晉 dignitary who was not satisfied with the small amount of broth served to him at the banquet:

且唯戎狄則有體薦。夫戎狄冒沒輕儻，貪而不讓。其血氣不治，若禽獸焉。其適來班貢，不俟馨香嘉味，故坐諸門外，而使舌人體委與之。

It is only Rong and Di who receive the entire corpse [of a sacrificial animal at the banquet]. Yet, Rong and Di enter hastily and despise order, they are greedy and unwilling to yield, their blood and breath is unmanageable, just like that of birds and beasts. When they arrive to submit tribute, they cannot wait for fragrance and fine taste; therefore, we make them sit outside the gate and send the translator to give them the corpse [of the sacrificial animal].⁴

This passage unmistakably distinguishes between the civilized members of the Xia civilization and uncouth aliens, who are unable to control their emotions and cannot partake in the refined ritual culture of the Zhou world. Regardless of whether the king's speech reflects the Springs-and-Autumns period perceptions (which, in my eyes, is likely), or the views of the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國, 453-221 BCE) period editors of the *Discourses of the States*, there is no doubt that the passage is highly relevant to Bergeton's discussion. Yet this is just the sort of passage that Bergeton's methodology inevitably fails to take into account. First,

³ See Yuri Pines, "Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy," in *Mongols, Turks and Others*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 59-102.

⁴ *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解, annotated by Xu Yuangao 徐元誥 (1878-1955), collated by Wang Shumin 王樹民 and Shen Changyun 沈長雲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 2.7, 58 ("Zhou yu 周語 2").

Bergeton ignores the *Discourses of the States* almost entirely.⁵ Second, the passage does not use the term *wen*, which, in Bergeton's eyes, should serve as a major keyword for China's civilizational consciousness. Third, even if Bergeton had paid proper attention to the term *li* 禮, he would have missed the above passage, which does not employ this term. Yet the fact that civilizational consciousness is not overtly lexicalized in the above passage does not mean that it is not clearly articulated. By ignoring this and a great variety of similar statements, Bergeton impoverishes his discussion.

Inadequate selection of terms to be explored and flawed understanding of the texts' dating create at times considerable distortions in Bergeton's conclusions. This is most evident in chapter 4, which discusses the Zhou conceptualization of non-Zhou ethno-political entities. Bergeton strives to demonstrate that the "Sino-barbarian" dichotomy according to which the aliens were conceptualized as "civilizationally inferior others" emerged only in the Warring States period in tandem with parallel reconceptualization of the term *wen* as referring to "civility/civilization." This conclusion is based on the author's observation that pre-Warring States period Zhou texts do not have "across-the board delineation of a 'civilized' world versus an 'uncivilized' periphery" (p. 137). Bergeton argues that early references to non-Zhou entities in the *Canon of Poems* (Shi jing 詩經) and in bronze inscriptions normally refer to specific groups, often using toponym compounds, such as Huai Yi 淮夷 or Northern Di 北狄. When the aliens are discussed in general terms, they are referred to not as culturally inferior but as "belligerents" (*rong* 戎). The sense of cultural otherness in Bergeton's eyes is associated either with emergent ethnonym compounds (such as *manyi* 蠻夷 and *rongdi* 戎狄), or with the more general designation *yi* 夷. These latter ways of referring to the aliens abound in the *Zuo Tradition/Zuo Commentary* (Zuozhuan 左傳), but this text is regarded in chapter four as decidedly belonging to the mid-to-late Warring States period. I shall turn to the question of *Zuozhuan* dating later; but first, it is easy to show the fallacy of Bergeton's conclusions by referring to unimpeachable evidence: bronze inscriptions.

There are several bronze inscriptions that unequivocally undermine Bergeton's analysis. Take for instance, the Rong Sheng-*bianzhong* 戎生編鐘 inscription from the eighth century BCE. The donor proudly claims that his "august ancestor" "relied on the ... divine power of the Son of Heaven Mu 穆天子 in order to establish himself in this external land so as to govern over Man and Rong."⁶ For sure, "Man and Rong" (or *manrong* 蠻戎) here are not references to specific ethnic groups (Man were not Rong's neighbors), but an ethnonym compound, albeit not a usual one such as, e.g., *manyi*. It is perhaps because of the rarity of this compound that it was overlooked by Bergeton. Or take a famous Qin Gong-*bo* 秦公罇 inscription, which

⁵ The *Discourses* are mentioned only in several footnotes that count the frequency of appearance of different ethnonyms in pre-imperial texts.

⁶ Cited from Maria Khayutina's translation in *A Source Book of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions*, ed. Paul R. Goldin and Constance A. Cook (Berkeley CA: The Society for Study of Early China, 2016), 251.

was composed a few generations later than Rong Sheng-*bianzhong* text. There the lord of Qin prides himself as the one who “cautiously cares for the Man and the Xia.” Here the term *man* 蠻 rather than *yi* 夷 is used as a default designation of the non-Xia aliens. Similar usage of *man* as a generalized name for the aliens recurs in other Qin inscriptions from ca. seventh century BCE.⁷ This usage is unusual, but the idea of unequivocal juxtaposition of “us” versus “them” and the generalized (rather than specific) usage of an ethnonym in these inscriptions are obvious. It is only by ignoring these cases that Bergeton could reach his conclusion according to which the distinction between the “civilized” Xia and the “barbarian” others emerged only during the Warring States period with the proliferation of such compounds as *manyi*, *rongdi*, *yidi* 夷狄 or generalized *yi* 夷 (pp. 155-156).

Bergeton's treatment of *Zuozhuan* is yet another aspect of the overall methodological weaknesses of his study. In the study focused on conceptual history, the dating of the cited passages matters a lot, and one should expect clear treatment of the text's dating (especially when we speak of *Zuozhuan*, the largest text in pre-imperial corpus and one of the major sources of Bergeton's citations). To be sure, this is a tough issue. On the one hand it is clear (at least to the present reviewer) that many of *Zuozhuan*'s speeches derive from its primary sources and as such reflect the intellectual milieu of the Springs-and-Autumns period. On the other hand, some of the speeches were certainly tampered with or outright invented by the text's compilers, editors, and transmitters, starting with the Warring States period and ending well into the Han.⁸ Due to the immense complexity of this issue, it would be unfair to demand a systematic treatment beyond Bergeton's extensive endnote on pp. 82-84. One should, however, expect consistency. In a few chapters (2, 5), Bergeton treats *Zuozhuan* as reflective of the period 600-400 BCE, which may be debatable, but for sure can be accepted as a working hypothesis. In chapter 4, however, Bergeton places *Zuozhuan* into the late Warring States period, grouping it not with the *Analects*, as in other chapters, but with the *Mengzi*, *Xunzi* 荀子, and *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (see, e.g., Tables 4.1 and 4.2). One cannot use two different dates for a single text in different chapters. I hope that this is a case of mere negligence and not of deliberate manipulation.

To be sure, placing *Zuozhuan* into the latter half of the Warring States period supports nicely Bergeton's scheme of a relatively late emergence of the “Sino-barbarian” dichotomy. Yet this interpretation obscures a very interesting phenomenon, which is actually well observable from Bergeton's data: the frequency of

⁷ All these are translated by Martin Kern in *A Source Book*, 246-248.

⁸ For different views of *Zuozhuan*, compare David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2001); Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722-453 BCE* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Li Wai-ye, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2007). See also “Introduction” to Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg, trans., *Zuo Tradition/ Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals”* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2016). I address some of these debates anew in my forthcoming book *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press).

reference to the alien ethnic groups in *Zuozhuan* by far surpasses that of other Warring States-period texts. This is not accidental, of course. In my eyes it reflects the historical situation of the Springs-and-Autumns period. It was then that the tensions between the Zhou world and the alien periphery reached their peak, especially in the eighth-seventh centuries BCE, which witnessed a series of Rong and Di incursions deep into the Zhou heartland.⁹ In the Warring States period, in distinction, alien groups were marginal players in the political struggles which revolved around the conflicts among the Zhou states. Hence, most of the Warring States-period texts, including such a major compilation as *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策), pay minimal attention to alien ethnicities. If Bergeton were to compare the latter text (which is entirely omitted from his study) with *Zuozhuan*, he would easily discern how dramatically the interest in the alien groups *diminished* rather than increased during the Warring States period. Whereas this observation would not fit Bergeton's scheme according to which civilizational consciousness emerged in the Zhou world only during the Warring States period, it would present a more nuanced—and, in my eyes, much more convincing—picture.

Another notable feature observable in *Stratagems of the Warring States* and other mid-to-late Warring States-period texts (but never in *Zuozhuan*) is the abundance of invocations of the epithet “barbarian” to depict the states that originally were part of the Zhou *oikouménē*, such as Chu 楚 and Qin 秦. Bergeton notices some of these instances, but seems to misunderstand them. For instance, when Mengzi pejoratively identifies Chu as *yi* barbarians, Bergeton opines that this designation refers to Chu's “strong local traditions and a distinct material culture,” citing Constance Cook and John Major's *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China* in his support (p. 163 n60).¹⁰ Actually, if he had read Xu Shaohua's archeological article *in this very volume*, he would have learned that early Chu culture was indistinguishable from the mainstream Zhou culture; it was only in the Warring States period that strongly pronounced Chu local identity emerged.¹¹ As for the sudden exclusion of Qin from the Xia cultural framework, Bergeton ignores it altogether.¹² In the eyes of the present reviewer, this silence is most unfortunate. Bergeton missed an opportunity to show how the construction of Zhou/Chinese civilizational consciousness was accompanied by the complex processes of inclusion of erstwhile “barbarians” on the one hand and exclusion of erstwhile Xia/Chinese on the other. Once again, this omission significantly impoverishes Bergeton's discussion.

⁹ These incursions peaked with the elimination of the states of Xing 邢 and Wei 衛 by Di invaders in 661-660 BCE.

¹⁰ *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China*, ed. Constance Cook and John Major (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

¹¹ Xu Shaohua, “Chu Culture: An Archaeological Overview,” in *Defining Chu*, 21-32.

¹² See e.g., Yuri Pines, “The Question of Interpretation: Qin History in Light of New Epigraphic Sources,” *Early China* 29 (2004): 1-44.

There is no point to continue with in-depth discussion of other weaknesses of Bergeton's book, such as inaccurate translations,¹³ or the very questionable association of Chinese notion of historical change with the European concept of "progress."¹⁴ My final comments are to the publisher, who opted for a very odd format of the book. First, each chapter appears as a standalone essay with its own endnotes and a separate bibliography. This is very odd in this book, whose chapters are, after all, closely related to each other, and which abounds with cross-references. Second, and worse, either under the publisher's pressure or for whatever other reason, the author buried much of the discussion in the endnotes. Some of these (like the aforementioned n85 on pp. 82-84) attain truly behemoth proportions. More oddly, many of the important tables (e.g., 4.1 and 4.2) are relegated to the endnotes as well, whereas much less informative (and probably redundant) figures (e.g., Figure 4.2) remain in the main text. These do not make Bergeton's book easier to read.

I am sorry if my review sounds harsh. I do sympathize with the author's research focus and am sure that a more carefully prepared study would yield much more compelling results. I hope that Bergeton will be encouraged to go beyond the "word-by-word" approach to explore the full complexity of Chinese civilizational consciousness and its fluctuations before and after the imperial unification.

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¹³ See for instance Bergeton's translation of the famous statement in the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳: 楚有王者則後服，無王者則先叛 (Xi 4) as "When Chu has a [true] king then they will submit [to the Son of Heaven]; lacking a [true] king they will be the first to revolt" (p. 166 n84). This is a gross misunderstanding. Chu by definition could not have a "true king" (I prefer translating *wang zhe* 王者 as "True Monarch"). According to the *Gongyang zhuan* ideology, there could be only one True Monarch: that of the Central States. The passage should be read: "Chu is the last to submit when there is a True Monarch, and the first to rebel when there is none."

¹⁴ See pp. 102-106. Eager to emphasize putative similarities between Chinese and European ideologies, Bergeton identifies Chinese views of "changing with the times" and of historical evolution with "progress," failing to notice that not a single Chinese thinker of the Warring States period argued that the "present" is better than the past (and the future will be better than the present), which is essential for European views of progress (for these, see Sidney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress: History and Society* [London: Watts, 1968]). Chinese ideas of "changing with the times" and "historical evolution" (which is not identical to progress!) has been explored in several studies, which were either not consulted or not adequately utilized by Bergeton. See, e.g., Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001); Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), 170-174; Yuri Pines, "From Historical Evolution to the End of History: Past, Present and Future from Shang Yang to the First Emperor," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 25-45.