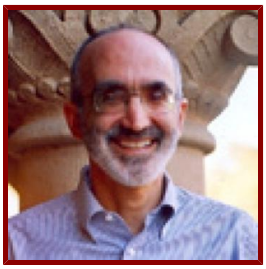
Stanford



Mark Lewis

Kwoh-Ting Li Professor of Chinese Culture, Emeritus
History Department

Bio

BIO

Mark Edward Lewis's research deals with many aspects of Chinese civilization in the late pre-imperial, early imperial and middle periods (contemporary with the centuries in the West from classical Greece through the early Middle Ages), and with the problem of empire as a political and social form.

His first book, Sanctioned Violence in Early China, studies the emergence of the first Chinese empires by examining the changing forms of permitted violence—warfare, hunting, sacrifice, punishments, and vengeance. It analyzes the interlinked evolution of these violent practices to reveal changes in the nature of political authority, in the units of social organization, and in the defining practices and attitudes of the ruling elites. It thus traces the changes that underlay the transformation of the Chinese polity from a league of city-states dominated by aristocratic lineages to a unified, territorial state governed by a supreme autocrat and his agents.

His second book, Writing and Authority in Early China covers the same period from a different angle. It traces the evolving uses of writing to command assent and obedience, an evolution that culminated in the establishment of a textual canon as the foundation of imperial authority. The book examines the full range of writings employed in early China, including divinatory records, written communications with ancestors, government documents, collective writings of philosophical traditions, speeches attributed to historical figures, chronicles, verse anthologies, commentaries, and encyclopedic compendia. It shows how these writings in different ways served to form social groups, administer populations, control officials, invent new models of intellectual and political authority, and create an artificial language whose mastery generated power and whose graphs become potent, almost magical, objects.

His third book, The Construction of Space in Early China, examines the formation of the Chinese empire through its reorganization and reinterpretation of its basic spatial units: the human body, the household, the city, the region, and the world. It shows how each higher unit—culminating in the empire—claimed to incorporate and transcend the units of the preceding level, while in practice remaining divided and constrained by the survival of the lower units, whose structures and tensions they reproduced. A companion volume, The Flood Myths of Early China, shows how these early Chinese ideas about the constituent elements of an ordered, human space—along with the tensions and divisions therein—were elaborated and dramatized in a set of stories about the re-creation of a structured world from a watery chaos that had engulfed it.

In addition to these specialist monographs, Lewis has written the first three volumes of a six-volume survey of the entire history of imperial China: The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han, China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties, and China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty. These volumes serve as introductions to the major periods of Chinese history for non-specialists, and as background readings to introductory

surveys. In addition to recounting the major political events, they devote chapters to the most important aspects of the society of each period: geographic background, cities, rural society, kinship, religion, literature, and law.

He has published a new monograph, Honor and Shame in Early China, which traces evolving ideas about honor and shame in the Warring States and early empires in order to understand major developments in the social history of the period. It examines the transformation of elites and the emergence of new groups through scrutinizing differing claims to “honor” (and consequent re-definitions of what was “shameful”) entailed in claiming a public role without necessarily being a noble or an employee of the state.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Emeritus Faculty, Acad Council, History Department

PROGRAM AFFILIATIONS

- Center for East Asian Studies

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

- Ph.D, University of Chicago
- B.A., University of Chicago

Teaching

COURSES

2024-25

- Early Chinese Thought: HISTORY 190, HISTORY 90 (Spr)
- Female Divinities in China: FEMGEN 293E, HISTORY 293E, HISTORY 393E (Aut)

2023-24

- Global History: The Ancient World: HISTORY 1A (Aut)
- Pre-Modern Chinese Warfare: HISTORY 291G, HISTORY 391G (Win)
- Pre-Modern Warfare: HISTORY 208D, HISTORY 308D (Aut)
- Thinking About War: HISTORY 10N (Win)

STANFORD ADVISEES

Doctoral Dissertation Reader (AC)

Jingpu Li

Publications

PUBLICATIONS

- **Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China (Book Review)** *TOUNG PAO*
  Book Review Authored by: Lewis, M.
  2018; 104 (5-6): 673–79
- **SARAH ALLAN, BURIED IDEAS: LEGENDS OF ABDICATION AND IDEAL GOVERNMENT IN EARLY CHINESE BAMBOO-SLIP MANUSCRIPTS: A REVIEW ARTICLE** *EARLY CHINA*
  Lewis, M.
  2016; 39: 265–84

- **The politics of princesses' social networks: A gendered investigation into the political history of early medieval China (Book Review)** *NAN NU-MEN WOMEN AND GENDER IN CHINA*
  Book Review Authored by: Lewis, M.
  2014; 16 (2): 367–71
- **Death in Ancient China. The Tale of One Man's Journey (Book Review)** *TOUNG PAO*
  Book Review Authored by: Lewis, M.
  2008; 94 (4-5): 360–64
- **The Rise of the Chinese Empire, vol 1, Nation, State, and Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C.-A.D. 8, vol 2, Frontier, immigration, and empire in Han China, 130 B.C.-A.D. 157 (Book Review)** *TOUNG PAO*
  Book Review Authored by: Lewis, M.
  2008; 94 (4-5): 365–71