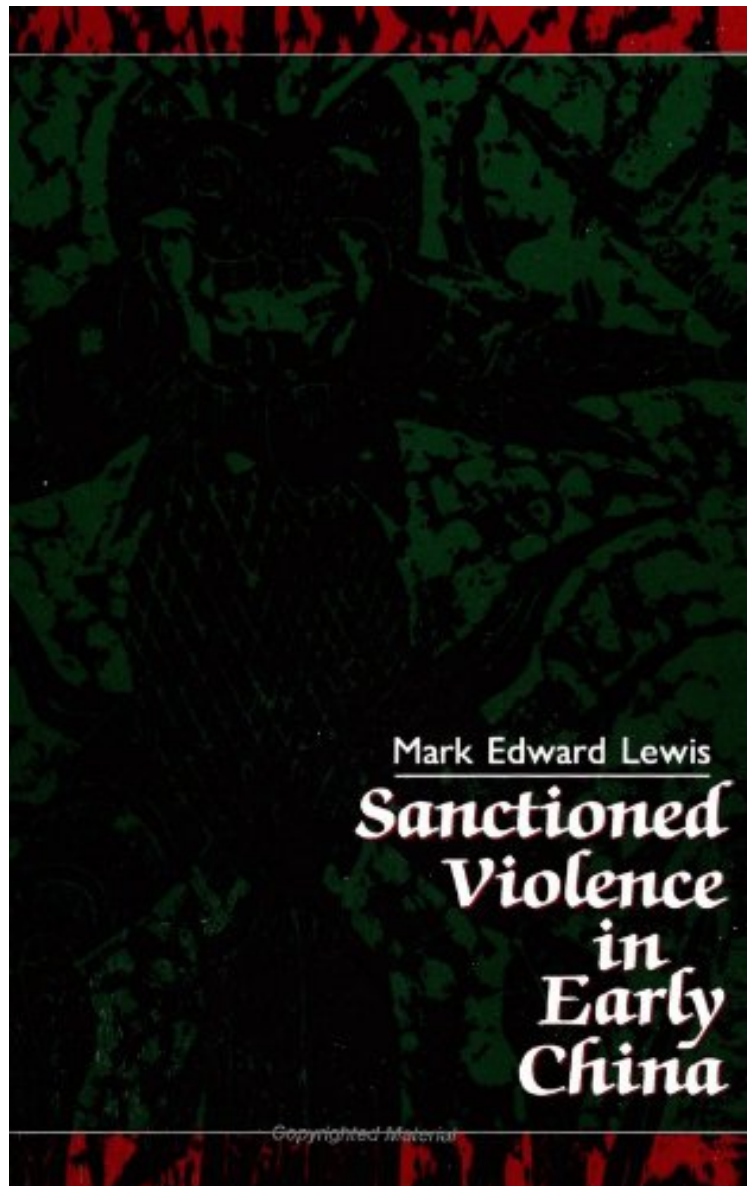


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## **Sanctioned Violence in Early China (Suny Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture) (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Paperback))**

*Mark Edward Lewis*

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**Mark Edward Lewis : Sanctioned Violence in Early China (Suny Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture) (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Paperback))** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or

not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Suny Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture) (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Paperback)):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Good, Could Have Been GreatBy T. GreerMark Edward Lewis's *SANCTIONED VIOLENCE IN ANCIENT CHINA* is an excellent piece of scholarship that shows both of the strengths and weaknesses of modern Chinese historiography. The first two chapters, "The Warrior Aristocracy" and "The Warring State," describe the social order of the Spring and Autumn Era (771 BC-476 BC) and Warring States Era (476-221 BC) of ancient China. The world recorded in the Spring and Autumn annals is in many ways unique; its society, institutions, and culture bear closer resemblance to the splintered realms of Medieval Europe than they do any subsequent eras of Chinese history. During this time China did not exist in an institutional sense - there was a common culture, but no central political authority. The land was dotted with scattered cities and estates that served as the home of China's warrior aristocracy. This aristocracy was fragmented, united only through extravagant oaths and extended ties of kinship. Their glory was the hunt, the sacrificial altar, and the battlefield; living for little else, such "sanctioned violence" was endemic. There was no monopoly on violence, and as happened in Medieval Europe, kings often found that their vassals had more men at their command than they did. This all changed as time passed on. Warfare was at the center of these changes; as one lineage after another was exterminated by the sword the aristocratic lords extended their rule across the countryside and created mass armies to ensure their own survival. Noblemen tied together by oaths were replaced with bureaucracies; small chariot-based armies dominated by individualistic aristocrats were replaced with massed infantry commanded by professional generals. War made the Chinese states and the states existed for the sake of war. The changing role of the military commander - as exemplified in texts like Sunzi's *Art of War* and the other *Military Classics of Ancient China* - are examined in the third chapter, "The Art of Command." The focus of the last three chapters, "Cosmic Violence", "Social History of Violence", and "Natural Philosophy of Violence," is on culture, not the institutional or social aspects of ancient Chinese warfare. Lewis devotes these last 100 pages to a detailed discussion of how Chinese elites changed their creation myths, architecture, rituals, and cosmology to better fit their new world of warring states. I do not know if any American understands the culture of ancient China as well as Mark Edward Lewis does; *SANCTIONED VIOLENCE IN ANCIENT CHINA* is a testament to his complete command of the classical Chinese sources. He uses this knowledge in such remarkable ways: the survey of Spring/Autumn and Warring State society provided in the first two chapters is the best of its kind. However, I cannot help feeling that this book is so much less than it could be. It is a perfect example of what I find so frustrating with modern Chinese historiography. While Lewis "attempts a general characterization of the [Warring States] transition... based on the assumption it was primarily a political and social phenomena" (5-6), Lewis writes very little about the era's actual political history. There are a whole host of questions (What lineages or states benefited most from the transition? Why were some states torn apart by civil war while rulers were able to retain power without major contest? Why did so much of the Spring/Autumn period revolve around hegemonic competitions between leagues north and south? Why did hegemons have such a harder time maintaining alliances during the Warring States era? And so on and so forth...) that no scholar has touched for the better part of 60 years. If anybody could write authoritatively on this topic it is Mark Edward Lewis. He forgoes the attempt, deciding instead to focus on the connections between warfare and the era's cosmology and gender imagery. Cultural history has its place and there is nothing wrong with its study. But for two generations cultural and philosophic history has been the central focus of Chinese historiography. Political, diplomatic, and military histories of ancient China are yet to be written. Even with the first three stellar chapters of this book, *SANCTIONED VIOLENCE IN ANCIENT CHINA* does precious little to fill the gap. NOTE: The book has 80 pages of detailed notes, a 17 page 'works cited' section, and a 12 page index. It does not include maps or a chronology.9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Far too much twisting of sources to fit the argumentsBy TingyunThis book suffers from a fatal flaw - the author often presents strained interpretations of ancient texts and stories in order to make it appear that they support his point. Certainly, no work of historical scholarship can be completely objective, but there should be an obligation to stay within the realm of reasonable interpretation (and, if you intend to present an interpretation of a highly questionable nature, you should at least cite counterarguments and warn the reader). To raise just a few examples: Lewis argues that a sense of honorable behavior even extended to conduct on the battlefield, and cites Lord Xiang of Song as evidence for this, noting how he refused to attack the enemy while they crossed the river (under the principle that he must give them time to properly form their ranks and not launch an attack against an unprepared enemy). The problem is, Lord Xiang is such an important historical figure precisely because his actions were so rare and so often argued as unjustifiable - Lewis is taking someone famous precisely for being extreme and unique and treating him as the demonstrative example of a prevalent pattern. Next, in arguing that relations between lord and minister were sexualized and seen as an "identical relation" to that between husband and wife, Lewis cites the story of Confucius resigning his post when his lord became distracted by dancing girls. This is absurd - any fair reading of the story will reveal that Confucius despaired because of the political ramifications of the ruler's turn to hedonism (and resulting neglect of governance), not because he was in the position of a jealous mate. In arguing for an overwhelming importance of vengeance, Lewis mentions a historical event where

the ruler of a country was killed by Zhao Chuan, yet Zhao Dun was recorded as the killer by a historian of the time because he did not punish the actual killer. Lewis tells us that "here the obligation to avenge a murdered lord is treated as so absolute that to fail to do so was tantamount to killing him oneself." This is again absurd - a fair reading of the story shows there was every reason to believe that Zhao Dun was complicit or directly involved in the killing (Lewis translates the historian's accusation of Zhao Dun complicity in the killing in a distorted manner, leaving out the accusatory aspects, including the historian's observation that Zhao Dun's interests were aligned with those of the killer). Later, Lewis discusses the famous quote from Xunzi, where a ruler is warned that he is like a boat, and the people are like water. This analogy is a celebrated one in the tradition, and is used to warn a ruler of his dependency on the people, and their ability to overthrow him - "water can carry the boat, yet it can also overturn it." The focus is on the agency of the people, and their importance to the ruler. Lewis's reading? "[This analogy] reduced the people to the status of formless, insensate, potentially chaotic matter and granted design and purpose solely to the ruler." The above are merely a few examples among the many I noticed. I am not an expert on ancient China, and I am sure many strained interpretations escaped my attention. Errors are understandable, and present in any book - but a consistent policy of reshaping the sources in any way necessary to support one's conclusion is a fatal flaw in a work of history.

9 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Thoroughly interesting. By Customer This book is used as a reference in many books about ancient China by prominent authors. There is good reason: it is engrossing in its discussion of how myths of sage-emperors actually reflected customs found in supposedly "enlightened" eras. It is startling to learn how many people -- including the supposedly benign "creator" of the Yijing -- fed people stews made of their enemies. The scholarship is amazing and so is the journey from the world of the Zhou to the Han and the differences in the amount of control over individual lives.

This book provides new insight into the creation of the Chinese empire 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 basic units of social organization, and in the fundamental commitments of the ruling elite. The work offers a new interpretation of 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 controlled by a supreme autocrat and his agents. In addition, it shows how a new pattern of violence was rationalized and how the Chinese of the period incorporated their ideas about violence into the myths and proto-scientific theories that provided historical and natural prototypes for the imperial state.

The interpretation of warfare is rich in providing a coherent statement on a subject poorly understood by Westerners. This book is a substantial and highly original piece of work. Roger T. Ames What I like most about the book is the author's mastery of the essential primary and secondary sources, and that he has marshalled these to discuss an essential theme in ancient Chinese history. The author's knowledge of the anecdotal literature is extremely good and impressive. I also like the fact that he is using materials ignored by earlier scholars as well as newly-excavated manuscripts. Jeffrey Riegel "The interpretation of warfare is rich in providing a coherent statement on a subject poorly understood by Westerners. This book is a substantial and highly original piece of work." -- Roger T. Ames "What I like most about the book is the author's mastery of the essential primary and secondary sources, and that he has marshalled these to discuss an essential theme in ancient Chinese history. The author's knowledge of the anecdotal literature is extremely good and impressive. I also like the fact that he is using materials ignored by earlier scholars as well as newly-excavated manuscripts." -- Jeffrey Riegel About the Author Mark Edward Lewis is University Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Cambridge.