

late imperial history, legal studies and book history, can instruct one another in provocative ways.

JOSEPH P. McDERMOTT

St. John's College, University of Cambridge

Honor and Shame in Early China. By Mark Edward Lewis. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. vi + 258. \$39.99.

Honor and Shame in Early China is a Mark Edward Lewis book through and through, featuring methodical argumentation advancing sweeping historical claims backed by an expansive bibliography in English, Chinese, Japanese, French, and German. (As always, the footnotes alone are worth the cover price.) One learns *a lot* from a Lewis book, and *Honor and Shame* is no exception. There are few scholars whose monographs challenge us to step back, take stock, and think big like Lewis's do. Thus, the Mark Edward Lewis book has given rise to the tortured subgenre of the Mark Edward Lewis book review, featuring many well-deserved accolades followed by the reviewer's apologies for being unable to match the scope of a Lewis book in the space allotted.

With my own apologies for being unable to do justice to the depth and breadth of Lewis's latest book, the jumping-off point for this review is the nagging sense of *déjà vu* I experienced upon reading *Honor and Shame*. The continuities between it and earlier instalments in the Lewis oeuvre, especially *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* and *Writing and Authority in Early China*,¹ are striking—so striking, in fact, as to suggest a recurring formula:

1. The central problem in a Lewis book is empire, not just the Qin or Han version of it but Empire with a capital-E: “the unprecedented enterprise of founding a world empire” (*Writing and Authority*, p. 4)

¹ Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990); Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

and “the development of the Chinese polity and society that characterized the imperial era as a whole” (*Sanctioned Violence*, p. 247). The ultimate goal is to explain how “empires [became] the dominant political form in continental East Asia” (*Honor and Shame*, p. 15).

2. Chronologically, a Lewis book “deals primarily with the Warring States period” (*Writing and Authority*, p. 1) because the answer to the problem of empire lies in “the Warring States transition,” which “entailed a comprehensive re-creation of human society through changes in the basic units of society, in the nature of the ties that constituted the public realm, and in the role, distribution, and sanction of authority” (*Sanctioned Violence*, p. 13).
3. A Lewis book is a work of social and political history that aims to uncover “the links between the imperial system and localities, links far more numerous and penetrating than those provided by a bureaucratic administration dwarfed by the realm it was supposed to govern”; such links were “the mechanism by which the institution of the empire survived the collapse of each of its incarnations” (*Writing and Authority*, p. 4). In this way, “we can see the full form of a political order that is too often lost in focusing on the bureaucratic state” (*Honor and Shame*, p. 16).
4. The choice of central topic (sanctioned violence, writing and authority, etc.) is justified both as a “decisive element of the political order” and as a “definer and creator of social groupings” (*Sanctioned Violence*, p. 1). The second of these criteria is most critical, as these social groups created “an informal public realm that both challenged and complemented the formal political order” (*Honor and Shame*, p. 13); they also “helped maintain social order, becoming fundamental to the Han and later empires” (*Honor and Shame*, p. 220).

To summarize: a Lewis book attributes the success of The Chinese Imperial Order to the social groups that mediated between the state and local society. The constitutive features of those social groups are the main topics of Lewis books.

There are important differences among these monographs, of course. From *Sanctioned Violence* through *Honor and Shame*, Lewis has become more and more interested in the early imperial context, with the result that *Honor and*

Shame devotes as many chapters to the Qin, Western Han, and Eastern Han as to the pre-Qin context. In this late-career Lewis book, the social cement of Chinese Empire does not set until the Eastern Han. Overall, however, the template remains the same.

How does *Honor and Shame* advance this agenda? The introduction reviews the secondary literature on honour and shame in various cultural contexts. An early subheading (“The Social Roles of Honor and Shame”) announces that honour and shame are important insofar as they define social groups. Citing works by Julian Pitt-Rivers, Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Deirdre McCloskey, among others, Lewis observes that “debates [about honour and shame] between status groups or intellectual traditions were . . . crucial for social change” (p. 3). *Honor and Shame* is meant to demonstrate “the revolutionary possibilities of altering honor language” (p. 9) in the early Chinese context, too.

Chapter one (“Honor and Shame of the King and Warrior”) reads the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 as a guide to honour among the warrior aristocrats of the early Eastern Zhou, which sets the stage for the social changes of the Warring States period. Chapter two (“Acquired Honor in the Warring States”) reads the *Lunyu* 論語 and *Mengzi* 孟子 as guides to the social order that emerged in response to the aristocracy’s decline. At the forefront of this transition were the “scholars” who “formed groups of teachers and students devoted to study and moral cultivation,” and who “condemned the conventional values which treated political rank and material wealth as the highest goods” (p. 84). Chapter three (“State-Based Honor in the Warring States”) reads the *Mozi* 墨子, military treatises, *Shangjun shu* 商君書, *Han Feizi* 韓非子, and *Xunzi* 荀子 as guides to the “radical vision” of the new “centralized state order” (p. 86) of the Warring States period. Key to that vision was the argument that “the state, as the sole mechanism for creating social order, should be the unique source of honor and shame” (p. 120). The same texts (along with the *Shiji* 史記) also acknowledge the existence of other “non-bureaucratic status groups” (pp. 122–23)—cliques, factions, private retainers, and bravoos—whose existence challenged that ideal.

The second half of *Honor and Shame* catalogues the key social groups of the early empire. Chapter four (“Honor of the Imperial Officials”) reads various Han sources as guides to the emergence of groups that competed for

honour on the early imperial stage: imperial officials, masters of literary language, legal experts, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (seemingly a group unto himself), and denizens of the inner court. Chapter five (“Honor in Local Society in the Early Empires”) opens with a section on the social networks of wandering bravoos and then turns to the local powerful families that emerged beginning in the late Western Han. Especially after the abolition of universal military service in 32 c.e., these families supplanted the bureaucracy as guarantors of order at the local level. Chapter five’s discussion of Eastern Han stele inscriptions as markers of local identity, drawing on the work of Kenneth Brashier and others, is especially valuable. Chapter six (“Honor and Shame of Writers and Partisans”) examines writers like Yang Xiong 揚雄 and Wang Chong 王充 who acquired honour through literary merit. There is also a section on the elite “anti-eunuch partisans” (p. 218) of the late Eastern Han who engaged in “extreme forms of seeking celebrity” (p. 218) through ostentatious acts of praise and blame. Finally, a brief conclusion restates the central thesis of *Honor and Shame*:

All these non-state groups helped maintain social order, becoming fundamental to the Han and later empires. The shifting rhetoric of glory and honor thus allowed Han writers both to *think* the state and to *think against* it, contributing to the empire’s functioning, but also creating patterns of action that led to the post-Han world. (p. 220)

* * *

How successfully does *Honor and Shame* advance the Lewis agenda? As a guide to early discourses about honour and shame, the book is an unmitigated success. However, *Honor and Shame* also left this reviewer with a number of lingering questions about the early Chinese “honor-shame complex” (p. 2) and its role in the formation of Chinese Empire.

Concept creep. There are few texts in *Honor and Shame* that are not about the “honor-shame complex” in some way, shape, or form. Lewis defines honour as “a person’s value perceived by the self and his or her group” and shame as “the affective response to humiliation or rejection” (pp. 1–2). The introduction then lists “a cluster of terms that indicate aspects of [honour and shame],” including *ming* 名 (good name), *yu* 譽 (reown), *rong* 榮 (glory),

ru 辱 (disgrace), *guang* 光 and *yao* 耀 (brilliance), *gui* 貴 (socially noble), *jian* 賤 (base), *zun* 尊 (revered), *jing* 敬 (to honour), *bei* 卑 (lowly), *mian* 面 or *mianmu* 面目 (face), *lian* 廉 (incorruptibility), *jie* 節 (integrity), *chi* 恥 (shame) and its synonyms (*xiu* 羞, *can* 慚, *kui* 愧), and still more synonyms and antonyms besides (pp. 11–13). The occurrence of even one of these terms is enough for Lewis to claim a text for his project.

This is not a recipe for conceptual precision. (Lewis cites but does not engage with anthropologists who have criticized overly broad applications of “the honor-shame complex” to the Mediterranean context [p. 2, n. 3].) A short section from chapter three, “State-Based Honor in the *Mozi*,” illustrates this point. Within the span of four pages (pp. 87–90), Lewis discusses the notions of “elevating/honoring the worthy” (*shang xian* 尚賢), “honoring Heaven” (*zun tian* 尊天), honouring ghosts, the “glorious praise and noble reputation” (*guangyu lingwen* 光譽令聞) bestowed by Heaven on good rulers, preferring the praise of later generations to the praise of one’s contemporaries, and winning a good reputation through defensive warfare. All of this is supposed to show that the authors of the *Mozi* were the earliest Warring States thinkers to argue that “the state, as the sole mechanism for creating social order, should be the unique source of honor and shame” (p. 120). Setting aside the question of whether humans, Heaven, and ghosts were equal participants in the early honour-shame complex, how important are honour and shame to the *Mozi*, really? Another way to read these passages is that talk of honour and shame is incidental to the *Mozi*’s vision of political and moral order. When the political hierarchy is a virtue hierarchy of worthy men, order obtains. Verbs like *shang* 尚 and *zun* 尊 simply describe the behaviour of individuals who recognize their place within the hierarchy. Does Lewis mean to suggest that all status hierarchies are instances of an honour-shame complex?

A related problem is the connection between honour and morality. Consider his treatment of *Lunyu* 8/13 in chapter two’s discussion of “the redefinition of honor in the *Lunyu*”:

The Master said, “Trust your love of study, and defend the Way of goodness to the death. Do not enter a state in peril, nor dwell in a state in chaos. If the world has the Way, then show yourself, but if not, then hide away. If a state has the Way, then being poor and

humble is shameful. If it lacks the Way, then to be rich and noble is likewise shameful.”

Devotion to study and moral goodness define honor, so humble status and obscurity are to be chosen over rank and eminence in a state without morality. (p. 52)

Seemingly any account of the *dao* 道 can be phrased as a series of claims about honourable versus shameful conduct. The message of *Lunyu* 8/13 seems to be that learning, goodness, and service are all worthy ideals, with the caveat that service is subordinate to the other two. But is *Lunyu* 8/13 really *about* honour in some deeper sense? Does it provide evidence of a robust culture of honour? Does it show individuals engaging in honour-based decision-making? Seemingly not. Here, too, the problem is that Lewis’s descriptions of the early Chinese honour-shame complex are not always as thick (in a Geertzian sense) as he needs them to be. Much more successful are the sections in chapters five and six on “Honoring the Family as a Public Unit” and the honour- and celebrity-seeking that characterized the partisan disputes of the Eastern Han, largely because historical accounts and stele inscriptions from the Eastern Han are thicker sources than writings of the Warring States masters. One wonders what *Honor and Shame* might have looked like had Lewis prioritized his most richly documented case studies over his grand narrative of Chinese Empire.

Identity. Given Lewis’s definition of honour as “a person’s value perceived by the self *and his or her group*” (emphasis added), the question of identity looms large over *Honor and Shame*. In the case of the *Mozi*, what does group membership look like in a universalist text that proscribes in- and out-group distinctions altogether? Zooming out from the *Mozi*, what exactly is the relationship between group identity and honour/shame in the early Chinese context? Were all groups equal participants in the honour-shame complex, as *Honor and Shame* seems to assume?

Lewis addresses questions of identity most directly in the introduction. In general, however, he is much more interested in asserting the explanatory power of “the honor-shame complex” than explaining its relevance to particular contexts:

The honor-shame complex also reproduced a society's ideals *within* individuals, who incorporated them as sentiments that guided conduct. This interplay between social practices and individual character fostered social cohesion, and meant that such practices did not appear as external constraints . . .

The honor-shame complex distinguished groups as well as individuals. Dead heroes underlay lineage honor, and their descendants aimed to further this glory. Honor could also belong to a city, an empire, or a nation-state. (pp. 4–5)

For Lewis, distinctions matter less than conjunctions: the honor-shame complex “*also* reproduced . . .”; it applies to “groups *as well as* individuals . . .”; honour “could *also* belong to a city [*comma*] an empire [*comma*] or a nation-state” (p. 4; emphasis added). As the honour-shame complex metastasizes over the course of the book, it becomes harder and harder to understand its application in any given instance.

A related issue is that *Honor and Shame* oversimplifies questions of identity by pigeonholing texts and authors into particular groups. Recall point 4 above: in a Lewis book, non-state social groups are the heroes of the story; consequently, individuals are important primarily as representatives of social groups. Thus, Lewis discusses Jia Yi 賈誼 as an example of an “imperial official” in chapter four but could have also treated him as a scholar (chapter two), classicist (in another section of chapter four), or writer (chapter six). Sima Qian is discussed in chapter four as the creator of “a . . . form of intellectual or linguistic mastery that claimed recognition outside conventional bureaucratic channels” (p. 142). However, that label does not begin to do justice to Sima Qian's self-description in the final chapter of the *Shiji*, which trumpets his identity as an official expert in calendrics, as a member of the Sima clan, as the dutiful son of Sima Tan 司馬談, as a scholar, as a historian, as an admirer of Confucius, as a Han imperial subject, and as an author. Their identities must have been complicated, multi-hyphenated things, so under what circumstances did Jia Yi and Sima Qian identify with this or that social group? *Honor and Shame* is inspired by anthropological and ethnographic studies of the honour-shame complex in the Mediterranean cultures of the twentieth century (p. 1, n. 1). (The first works cited in the book are *Honour and Shame: The Values of*

Mediterranean Society, ed. J. G. Peristiany; and *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. David G. Gilmore.)² But how, if at all, can modern readers of ancient texts tackle questions of identity? Unfortunately, *Honor and Shame* does not pause to ask this question.

Textual chronology. One of the great contributions of *Honor and Shame* is the way it illuminates the diversity of ideas about honour and shame in the early Chinese context. Less persuasive to this reader was the attempt to package these ideas in neat chronological sequence culminating with empire. Chapter two's use of the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* is especially problematic. Lewis dates the earliest strata of the *Lunyu* to "shortly after the time of Confucius" (p. 49) in the fifth century B.C.E., with the *Mengzi* emerging in the fourth century B.C.E. ("along with the *Zuozhuan*," which would seem to complicate the decision to focus on the *Zuozhuan* in chapter one). The fact that "both texts continued to develop during the Warring States" and were "not completed until the Han" does not stop Lewis from reading them for "evidence about the emergence of new ideas of honor and shame among Warring States scholars" (pp. 49–50).

At the risk of overindulging my own scholarly preoccupations, I happen to believe that there is better evidence for dating the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* to the Han as opposed to the Warring States period. In a footnote (p. 49, n. 6), Lewis acknowledges John Makeham's seminal article on the dating of the *Lunyu* as well as my own work on the subject.³ However, Lewis mistakenly credits this reviewer as the author of a monograph entitled *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship*;⁴ in fact, this publication is a collection of essays by ten early China scholars (including John Makeham) co-edited by myself and Martin Kern. Is Lewis familiar with these "new perspectives"? On what grounds does he disagree with revisionist

² J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965); David G. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987).

³ John Makeham, "The Formation of *Lunyu* as a Book," *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996): 1–24.

⁴ Michael Hunter and Martin Kern, eds., *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

chronologies of the *Lunyu*? Likewise for the *Mengzi*, Lewis cites my article on the chronology of the *Mengzi* but simply labels it “controversial” without acknowledging its arguments.⁵

Disagreements about textual chronology are not merely academic. In a Lewis book, the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* play a critical role in the Warring States transition by providing evidence of the first non-state, non-aristocratic forms of social organization. The *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* were created by, and helped to create, a new scholarly consciousness that was a key ingredient of the emerging imperial order. That is why Lewis in *Honor and Shame* focuses almost exclusively on *Lunyu* passages that privilege learning and virtue over official service.

But if we read the *Lunyu* as an artefact of Han imperial and dynastic interests in the second half of the second century B.C.E., a very different picture emerges. As I have argued, the *Lunyu* is obsessed with the problem of evaluating and selecting individuals for office, as seen in parallels with Han imperial edicts calling for the recruitment of talented officials. I have gone so far as to suggest that we might translate “*Lunyu*” as “*Sayings on Assessing [Others for Office]*.”⁶ If there is a single social group responsible for the *Lunyu*, it would seem to be the scholar-officials of the first half of the Western Han. Of course, reasonable people can and will disagree about such matters. The real problem is that Lewis has constructed a framework that cannot tolerate problematic textual chronologies.

The role of the state. This brings me to my final critique of *Honor and Shame*. Recall that a main feature of a Lewis book is its preference for social, as opposed to bureaucratic, explanations for the success of Chinese Empire, hence Lewis’s embrace of the traditional account of the *Lunyu* as a pre-imperial text. This is one way in which his a priori aversion to bureaucratic or state-centric explanations limits his analysis. Another is the low profile of official rank systems in *Honor and Shame*. On the one hand, Lewis credits the creation of the Qin 秦 rank system by Shang Yang 商鞅 as “one of the pivotal moments in Chinese history, entailing the weakening and then elimination of the nobility, the concentration of power in the court, the incorporation of the whole free population into the state, and the re-creation of the elite” (pp. 101–2). However, by confining his discussion of rank systems to chapter three,

⁵ Michael Hunter, “Did Mencius know the *Analects*?” *T’oung Pao* 100 (2014): 33–79.

⁶ Michael Hunter, *Confucius Beyond the Analects* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 250–56.

Lewis limits their relevance to the Warring States context, thus missing an opportunity to analyse the ongoing interactions among status, law, and honour under the Qin and Han.

As an example of the approach that *Honor and Shame* seems to preclude, Dwei Shen has argued in a recent dissertation chapter on “Identity (Trans) Formation of Local Elites in Postwar Jiangling” that the mortuary genre of *gaodice* 告地策 (notifications to underworld authorities) arose in response to anxieties about access to rank-related privileges, especially among widows of rank-holders.⁷ Modelled on administrative documents governing household relocations, *gaodice* secured the transfer of privileges into the afterlife. For the sake of the argument, let us take *gaodice* as evidence of Lewis’s honour-shame complex in the capital region of the former state of Chu 楚. How do we go about applying the distinction between state and non-state actors to Jiangling widows? Widows were a non-state social group yet “widow” (*gua* 寡) was also a recognized legal category with certain rights of succession. Widows could not inherit ranks but they could inherit privileges like exemption from taxation as “widows of rank-holders” (*you jue gua* 有爵寡), also a recognized legal category. And widows’ *gaodice* guaranteed the extension of those privileges into an afterlife modelled on the Han bureaucracy. Here, then, is a concrete demonstration of the penetration of imperial bureaucracy into local society mediated by individuals’ anxieties over identity and status. Is Lewis’s distinction between the “state and its agents” (p. 16) and the non-state social groups who “acted as an informal public realm” (p. 13) at all useful when dealing with complicated case studies like this one?

My reservations about Lewis’s framework aside, *Honor and Shame in Early China* makes a powerful case for the importance of honour and shame in the early context. It is required reading for all students and scholars of early Chinese social and political history.

MICHAEL HUNTER
Yale University

⁷ Dwei Shen, “The First Imperial Transition in China: A Microhistory of Jiangling (369–119 BCE)” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2021), chap. 6. See also chap. 5 for a review of rank systems from 356 B.C.E. through the first part of the Western Han.