

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910971736003321
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Titolo	The construction of space in early China // Mark Edward Lewis
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Albany, N.Y., : State University of New York Press, 2006
ISBN	9780791466087 0791466086 9780791482490 0791482499 9781423747925 1423747925
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (507 p.)
Collana	SUNY series in Chinese philosophy and culture
Disciplina	181/.11
Soggetti	Philosophy, Chinese - To 221 B.C Social groups - China
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. 431-470) and index.
Nota di contenuto	<p>""THE CONSTRUCTION OF SPACE IN EARLY CHINA""; ""CONTENTS""; ""ACKNOWLEDGMENTS""; ""INTRODUCTION""; ""UNITS OF SPATIAL ORDER""; ""THE EMPIRE AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SPACE""; ""1. THE HUMAN BODY""; ""DISCOVERY OF THE BODY IN THE FOURTH CENTURY b .c .""; ""THE COMPOSITE BODY""; ""INTERFACES OF THE BODY""; ""CONCLUSION""; ""2. THE HOUSEHOLD""; ""HOUSEHOLDS AS POLITICAL UNITS""; ""HOUSEHOLDS AS RESIDENTIAL UNITS""; ""HOUSEHOLDS AS UNITS OF LARGER NETWORKS""; ""THE HOUSEHOLD DIVIDED""; ""HOUSEHOLD AND TOMB""; ""CONCLUSION""; ""3. CITIES AND CAPITALS""; ""THE WORLD OF THE CITY-STATES"" ""CITIES OF THE WARRING STATES AND EARLY EMPIRES"" ""INVENTION OF THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL""; ""CONCLUSION""; ""4. REGIONS AND CUSTOMS""; ""THE WARRING STATES PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF CUSTOM""; ""CUSTOM AND REGION""; ""REGIONS AND THE GREAT FAMILIES""; ""REGIONAL AND LOCAL CUL""; ""RHAPSODIES ON REGIONS""; ""CONCLUSION""; ""5. WORLD AND COSMOS""; ""GRIDS AND MAGIC SQUARES""; ""THE BRIGHT HALL AND RULER-CENTERED MODELS""; ""MIRRORS, DIVINER'S BOARDS, AND OTHER COSMIC</p>

CHARTS""; ""MOUNTAINS AND WORLD MODELS""; ""CONCLUSION"";
""CONCLUSION""; ""NOTES""; ""INTRODUCTION""; ""CHAPTER ONE""
""CONCLUSION""; ""WORKS CITED""; ""INDEX"";

Sommario/riassunto

This book 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. The central theme of the book is the way all these forms of ordered space were reshaped by the project of unification and how, at the same time, that unification was constrained and limited by the necessary survival of the units on which it was based. Consequently, as Mark Edward Lewis shows, each level of spatial organization could achieve order and meaning only within an encompassing, superior whole: the body within the household, the household within the lineage and state, the city within the region, and the region within the world empire, while each level still contained within itself the smaller units from which it was formed. The unity that was the empire's highest goal avoided collapse back into the original chaos of nondistinction only by preserving within itself the very divisions on the basis of family or region that it claimed to transcend.
