

and skilled at analyzing narratives (be those shaped by local communities or the party-state) and their power, Fuller is somewhat oblivious to the effect of his own narrative structure. His exclusive focus on the erasure of the collective agency and the communal rescue efforts of “pre-modern” local society (an erasure which certainly took place) is also what prevents him from seeing (or allows him to elide) aspects of the revolutionary discourse that would complicate the picture significantly. Just to cite one obvious example, Mao’s own understanding of the rural and of rural revolution cannot be so easily reduced to the simple two-step process of deinscription/reinscription, as Mao’s logic configured a radical rethinking of the political subjectivity of the peasants. Revealingly, Fuller mentions Mao’s Hunan Report (the foundational text for that rethinking) only in passing, he quickly dismisses the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art (187), and bafflingly reduces the appeal of Maoism to the combination of its “spiritual quality” and “fear” (186). It does not help that in the last three chapters of the book, dealing with the 1950s, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, Fuller cites no primary sources.

Modern Erasures is an intriguing, thoughtful, and intellectually challenging book. Or at least two-thirds of it is. It would have been a much better and more complete endeavor had the author confronted the history of Maoism and the PRC with the same level of knowledge, skill, sophistication, and engagement that he deployed for earlier periods.

FABIO LANZA

University of Arizona

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Note

1. Rebecca Karl, “Engaging Gerth’s Sleights (of Hand),” *PRC History Review* 5, no. 1 (2020): 9.

Self-Cultivation Philosophies in Ancient India, Greece, and China. By Christopher W. Gowans. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. vii, 327 pp. ISBN: 9780190941024.

Philosophy is still predominantly considered a theoretical discipline. In *Self-Cultivation Philosophies in Ancient India, Greece, and China*, Christopher W. Gowans pushes back against this narrow conceptualization of philosophy by arguing that the ancient traditions it treats are best understood as self-cultivation philosophies, meaning programs of transformation for improving the lives of human beings.

The introduction explains and defends the concept of self-cultivation philosophy. Gowans’s careful account of a cross-cultural concept of self-cultivation accommodates the diverse conceptions found across the texts he examines. A fully fledged self-cultivation philosophy has four key elements: an underlying account of human nature (and our place in the world), a depiction of our existential starting point, a portrayal of the ideal state to be attained, and a program of transformation by which individuals may move from the starting point to the ideal. Gowans refers to these as the four-part structure of self-cultivation philosophies. The book then divides into three parts: India, Greece and Rome, and China.

Part 1 focuses on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Sāṃkhya and Yoga philosophies of Īśvarakṛṣṇa and Patañjali, and the teaching of the Buddha (here represented in the *Sutta Pitaka*) and his followers Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and Sāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. All these texts accept the Liberation Paradigm, where it is supposed that the life of each human being is one of a series that extends indefinitely into the past and will extend indefinitely into the future (without liberation). These texts are united in two central perspectives. The first is that a better life is available to us, which is free of mental distress. The second is that such a life is achieved through reflection on the true nature of the self. However, the texts differ on their specific understanding of the self, the ethical orientation of their ideals, and the practices they recommend.

Part 2 focuses on Hellenistic philosophy, particularly the Epicureanism of Epicurus, Lucretius, and Philodemus; the Stoicism of Chrysippus, Epictetus, and Seneca; and Pyrrho and the Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus. In these texts, philosophy heals the soul just as medicine cures the body. An important difference is that while the medical patient requires no knowledge, healing the soul entails changing one's beliefs. The Hellenistic self-cultivation philosophers differ in many respects, but they are united in seeking well-being in our current lifetime, unlike their Indian counterparts.

Part 3, perhaps the most ambitious, focuses on the early Confucian outlooks of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi; the classical Daoist perspectives of the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*; and the Chan tradition of Bodhidharma, Huineng, and Linji. While it is not particularly controversial to argue that the early Chinese texts proposed self-cultivation regimes, as Gowans points out, the book hopes to add value by characterizing them as *philosophies*. Gowans's book is another example that shows it is legitimate and valuable to read the Chinese texts as philosophy, in his case defined as a reflective practice that seeks understanding fundamental questions.

Gowans's book is one of the few that does three-way comparative philosophy, covering important and diverse texts from each tradition. Furthermore, it provides a systematic account of self-cultivation philosophies and how they manifest in different traditions. He does not argue that one cannot find self-cultivation philosophies elsewhere; his focus is on how we can use self-cultivation philosophy as a valuable explanatory framework for diverse texts and traditions. Gowans successfully shows how our understanding of each text benefits from his four-part structure. However, due to its sheer breadth, some of Gowans's textual interpretations (particularly of the Chinese sources) are controversial: for example, the proposal that Mencius primarily criticizes desires may surprise some specialists.

This is a book of many strengths. It is an accessible introduction on how to engage with diverse texts both philosophically and responsibly. Gowans showcases the many shapes philosophy takes across time and space (e.g., the notion of transformative texts, texts intended to facilitate some fundamental transformative process in the lives of their readers). It may also be helpful for specialists wanting to understand how issues in their own geographical fields expand to others. It is of particular value for philosophers who want to delve into non-Western thought and its many manifestations, since it guides one through the methodological issues that come with different texts and traditions (e.g., the difference between a *concept* and a *conception*). The reader is guided through the historical context and the predominant scholarly issues regarding the interpretation of the texts, authorship, and language. Gowans

also manages to do it without generalizing, showing instead the variety found within each philosophical tradition. For those reasons it is an important contribution to comparative endeavors and philosophy generally. Gowans shows how neither the contemporary philosophy of the seminar room, nor ancient Greek philosophy, is the paradigm of what is to count as philosophy.

ALBA CURRY

University of Leeds

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Retrofitting Leninism: Participation without Democracy in China. By Dimitar D. Gueorguiev. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 237 pp. ISBN: 9780197555682.

Not long ago, many if not most in the field would have argued that the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rule was likely to end in the near future. Socialism did not survive in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. Why should it last any longer in China? Gordon Chang famously argued that the CCP would end by 2011, and Bruce Gilley argued that China would soon have a democratic revolution. When the CCP did not collapse and the economy took off, many people explained that the CCP survived through performance legitimacy, that the regime presided over steady, even spectacular, economic growth in exchange for people's quiescence. In recent years, many have simply cited the growing authoritarianism of contemporary China: the CCP survived because people were scared.

Dimitar D. Gueorguiev approaches the issue quite differently. He argues that it is the combination of Leninism, on the one hand, and a degree of consultation, on the other, what he calls "controlled inclusion," which has allowed the CCP to survive and even improve governance. His thesis is that Leninism provides the controls and coercion while a degree of consultation ("inclusion") provides the feedback the regime needs to prevent it from careening out of control. Given Gueorguiev's stress on Leninism, one might expect more discussion of its defining features, but there is no mention of the works of Ken Jowitt, Juan Linz, Philip Selznick, or even the venerable work of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski. This is too bad, because such a discussion would allow Gueorguiev to explore the limits of Leninism—what happens to Leninism if the tension between state and society is reduced, does Leninism need an "enemy," and is corruption inevitable in post-reform Leninist states?

Gueorguiev's argument is formulated historically, theoretically, and empirically. Strangely enough, the historical part of this is the weakest. The argument relies heavily on Mao's notion of the "mass line"—"from the masses, to the masses"—but in reality the mass line played a very small role in the CCP's road to victory. Mao's famous "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art" were hardly an example of the mass line, as the writer Wang Shiwei learned too late. Certainly, the CCP's extension of power into the village during land reform brought the party into intimate contact with the masses, as did the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries in 1950–52, but this was not a period of consultation.