

To Increase And To Decrease: Education As Self-Cultivation In Classical Daoism And The Indian Gurukul

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Abstract: Classical Daoism and the Indian Gurukul tradition are rarely read together. Yet both view education not so much as a transmission of Information but the transformation of the whole person. This article compares them as philosophies of learning. It draws on the Daodejing, the Zhuangzi, and the Neiye on the Chinese side, and the early Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita and the classical literature on Vedic studentship on the Indian side, to argue that the two traditions share common grammar of cultivation: a realized teacher rather than a curriculum, embodied practice rather than verbal instruction alone, the neutral world as a site of learning and liberation or harmony rather than utility as the goal. However, they disagree on the direction of cultivation. The Gurukul nurtures the student through cumulative textual mastery, memorization, and staged discipline, under the maxim that knowledge is what liberates. Classical Daoism is a subtractive cultivation, in line with the Daodejing's claim that the pursuit of the way is a daily decrease towards non-action. Reading them side by side sharpens each one's sense of what education is for and yields a considered account of what recent discussions of experiential and contemplative learning might learn from these older models, with a frank recognition of their limits in history.

Keywords: Daoism, Gurukul, self-cultivation, comparative philosophy, education, wu-wei, guru-shishya, Upanishads, Zhuangzi

INTRODUCTION

Comparisons between Indian and Chinese thought have a long history, but a curious imbalance runs through them. Studies of metaphysics, mysticism, and soteriology are plentiful, while the two civilizations' ideas about teaching and learning are seldom set side by side (Theodor & Yao, 2013). This is odd, because both traditions produced elaborate accounts of how a person is formed, and both built institutions to carry those accounts into practice. The Indian Gurukul, the residential school organized around a teacher and a small band of resident students, transmitted the Vedas and much else for well over two millennia, and survived as a recognizable form until colonial schooling displaced it in the nineteenth century (Basham, 1954; Dharampal, 1983). Classical Daoism, gathered around the Daodejing 道德經 and the Zhuangzi 莊子, produced a distinctive vision of how a person becomes a sage, and later Daoist movements turned that vision into lineages, ordinations, and monastic curricula. The two are worth reading together not because they influenced one another, for which there is no good evidence in the early period, but because each throws the other into relief...

This article compares them as philosophies of education. My claim is twofold. First, beneath obvious differences of vocabulary and cosmology, the Gurukul and classical Daoism share a recognizable grammar of cultivation. Both treat the aim of education as the transformation of the person rather than the accumulation of information; both locate that transformation in a personal relationship with a realized teacher rather than in a delivered curriculum; both take embodied practice, and not verbal instruction alone, to carry the essential knowledge; both use the natural world as a teacher; and both measure success by liberation or harmony rather than by usefulness or credential. Second, despite the inclination to limit the comparison to similarities, the two traditions diverge on the question of whether cultivation entails strengthening or weakening an individual. The gurukul accumulates. Based on the idea expressed in an often-recited phrase that knowledge is precisely that which liberates *sā vidyā yā vimuktaye*, its students memorize enormous volumes of text, progress through predetermined stages of life, and subject to a protracted discipline. Classical Daoism simplifies. In its 48th chapter, the Daodejing presents the comparison with extraordinary directness: the pursuit of learning in the daily gain, but the pursuit of the Way is a daily decline, and the lowering continues until 1 reaches non action (Ziporyn, 2023).

The vessel is filled by 1 tradition and emptied by the other. The papers analytical effort is what keeps these two movements together. It would be simple to inflate the convergence into a nebulous perennialism in which all wisdom traditions say the same thing, and to overstate the opposition into a slogan, the East that accumulates against the East that let's go. The substance is flattened by both mistakes. The fact that the difference is genuine yet incomplete is more the intriguing outcome. The Bhagavadgītā cautions against those who take pleasure in the letter of the Veda and make it for the whole; the Upanishads maintain that the highest knowledge is the realization of the self, which no amount of recitation guarantees; and the cumulative mastery of the gurukul is not an end in itself (Malinar, 2007). For its part Daoism is not only anti-intellectual, it has its own texts, its own transmission, and, in its structured form, rigorous study and practice schedules (Kohn, 2001; Komjathy, 2007). Seeing this clearly is more helpful than either a forced identity or a neat opposition sense what distinguishes the 2 is not so much a philosophy about knowledge as it is a direction of travel.

The present is the focus of the last part. Both the Gurukul and Daoism are occasionally mentioned in the literature, usually in passing and frequently without much textual care, as there is a considerable current interest in experiential and contemplative approaches to education. The attempt is to say something more structured: to identify the particular pedagogical commitments that the two traditions share, to show where each might influence contemporary practice, and to be open about the characteristics that make wholesale borrowing neither feasible nor desirable, such as the cast and gender exclusions historically associated with Vedic studentship and the heavyweight both traditions placed on authority of the teacher. Because it refuses to be a brochure the goal is comparison that is helpful.

A note on Comparison

Comparative philosophy of religion has learned to be wary of its own procedures. Parallels are cheap, and the history of the field is littered with resemblances that dissolve on contact with the primary sources. Two safeguards structure what follows. The first is that the comparison is analogical rather than genetic. I am not arguing that Daoist and Indian ideas of learning share a common origin or that one shaped the other, only that reading them alongside each other clarifies each. The second is that the comparison stays close to texts and to the scholarship that interprets them. Where I describe the Gurukul I rely on the classical literature on Vedic studentship and on the standard modern study of ancient Indian education (Scharfe, 2002), together with Patrick Olivelle's work on the stages of life and his translations of the Upanishads (Olivelle, 1993, 1996). Where I describe Daoist views, I rely on the early texts in current scholarly translation (Ziporyn, 2020, 2023; Roth, 1999) and on the interpretive literature and the standard introductions (Slingerland, 2003; Graham, 1989; Kohn, 2009; Komjathy, 2013).

There is precedent for treating both traditions under a single analytic category. Christopher Gowans has argued that the *Bhagavadgītā* and classical Daoism both belong to a family of self-cultivation philosophies, outlooks that begin from a diagnosis of the ordinary human condition as troubled and offer a set of practices by which a person can be transformed into a better state (Gowans, 2021). The category is useful here, with one adjustment. Gowans is interested in self-cultivation as a philosophical structure; I am interested in it as a pedagogy, that is, in how the transformation is supposed to be taught and learned, by whom, in what setting, and through what activities. That shift from the content of cultivation to its transmission is where the Gurukul and Daoism have the most to say to each other, and it is where existing comparative work, including the essays gathered in *Brahman and Dao*, has said the least (Theodor & Yao, 2013; Jha, 2013).

The Gurukul: education as liberating knowledge

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The Sanskrit word *Gurukula* joins *guru*, teacher, and *kula*, family or household. The institution it names is a residential school in which the student lives in the teacher's home, sometimes for many years, as an *antevāsin*, one who dwells nearby. This living arrangement is not incidental to the pedagogy; it is the pedagogy. The student learns by proximity to the teacher and to older students, by observing conduct as much as by receiving instruction, and by participating in the daily labor of the household (Jayalakshmi & Smrithi Rekha, 2022). Hartmut Scharfe's survey of education in ancient India describes a system in which small, personal tutorials, rather than institutions of the modern kind, carried the bulk of learning, and in which the relationship between teacher and student was understood as a bond with obligations on both sides (Scharfe, 2002). In the standard older survey, Radha Kumud Mookerji stressed that this was a domestic rather than an institutional arrangement, an intimate bond between teacher and pupil, inaugurated by the rite of initiation and often lived out in forest hermitages rather than towns (Mookerji, 1989).

Entry into studentship was marked by a rite. The *upanayana*, the investiture with the sacred thread, initiated the boy into the life stage of *brahmacharya* and was spoken of as a second birth, a birth into knowledge (Olivelle, 1993; Mookerji, 1989). Olivelle has shown that the scheme of four life stages, the *āśramas*, of which studentship is the first, was not an ancient given but a system that took shape over time and remained contested; still, by the classical period the pattern of a long period of celibate study under a teacher, followed by householder life, was well established as an ideal (Olivelle, 1993). Although the term "brahmacharya" is frequently interpreted as "celibacy", which did entail sexual restriction, it refers to a broader notion of disciplined behavior focused on brahman, the sacred, and consequently on the knowledge that is its study. The tasks assigned to the students during the day included reciting, taking care of the teacher's necessities, begging food for the household, and tending to the teacher's fire. Recitation is important because it distinguishes the Gurukul as a developed tradition. The meaning of Vedas is "that which is heard", or "ruti", a collection of writings that has been passed down orally and through the memory of the learned for generations. Scharfe describes the methods used to accomplish precise preservation, including tired recitation styles that double check each syllable to ensure that no sound is lost (Scharfe, 2002). This elevates memory to the status of an art and a religious obligation. Nothing in the Daoist literature is comparable to it, and the difference will become significant in the future. For the time being, the Gurukul emphasizes the importance of internalizing definite corpus faithfully. The pupil becomes the live embodiment of the Veda rather than paraphrasing or improving upon it.

However, this mastery is not associated with the highest level of knowledge in the tradition. The contemplative writings that conclude the Vedic corpus, the Upanishads, frequently make a distinction between knowing many things and knowing the one thing that matters, which is identification of the self, *ātman*, with the ground of all being, brahman (Olivelle, 1996). In the 6th chapter of the Chāndogya Upanishad, the father Uddālaka tells his son Śvetaketu, who has return from twelve years of study filled with pride and knowledge, that despite his recitation, he has not understood the teaching that makes the unknown known and the unheard heard. Instead, he leads him to the famous proverb "tat tvam asi, that thou art" (Olivelle, 1996). The lesson is clear: while cumulative learning is a path, it is not a goal, and when it leads to arrogance, it may even become a barrier.

After building the vessel to the brim, the Gurukul maintains that the brim is not the point. Because it will rhyme with the Deoist content, one episode from the same Upanishad is worth pondering. A bull, a fire, a goose, and a diver bird each teach the boy Satyakāma Jābāla a quarter of brahman while he lives alone among the herds after his teacher sends him to pasture the household's cattle and not to return until the number a thousand (Olivelle 1996). When he returns, his teacher notices right away that he shines like someone who knows brahman and inquires as to who has taught him. Satyakāma responds that someone other than human has taught him. In this case, the natural environment serves as a learning agent rather than a backdrop. There is a literary justification for the woodland Hermitage, the *āśrama* surrounded by hills and rivers that appears in later gurukul idealization: nature educates.

The teacher and the student's perseverance are shown in the second scene from the Katha Upanishad. After being delivered to death by his enraged father, the kid Nasiketas spend three nights at Death's door. When Death offers him three boons, he spends the third on the one important question, what happens to a person after death, rather than wealth or long life, which Death puts upon him (Olivelle 1996). Death tries to divert him at first and only imparts knowledge when the boy rejects all alternatives. A questionnaire who refuses to be bought off with inferior products is the one who draws out instructions on the highest issues. Recurring throughout the Upanishads, the pattern of a learner who gains challenging knowledge via perseverance and the proper desire is part of Gurukul's compensation of how the most profound instruction

transpires.

Two further notes are added to this image of learning Bhagavadgītā, one of the most studied Indian books and apart off Mahābhārata. The first relates to how to approach an instructor. In the fourth chapter, Kūḷṣṇa informs Arjuna that knowledge can be acquired via prostration, questioning, and service (praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā). Those who have witnessed the truth will impart it to anyone who approaches them in this manner (Miller, 1986; Malinar, 2007). Here, learning is a relationship built on work and humility rather than a transaction; the student receives education via service. The second concerns the aim of action. The Gita's teaching of *karma-yoga*, action performed without attachment to its fruits, reframes the whole of the student's disciplined activity as a spiritual practice rather than a means to reward (Malinar, 2007). The famous line of the second chapter, that one's right extends to action alone and never to its fruits, is a formula for doing the work of formation for its own sake. Taken together, the Upaniṣadic and epic materials give the Gurukul its characteristic shape: a rigorous, cumulative, textually anchored discipline whose stated purpose lies beyond text, in a liberating self-knowledge that recitation prepares for but cannot deliver.

Classical Daoism: education as the return to the Way

Turn now to the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, the foundational texts of what later became the Daoist tradition. Neither is a treatise on education, and neither describes an institution like the Gurukul. What they offer instead is a vision of the fully realized person, the sage, *shengren* 聖人, or in the *Zhuangzi* the authentic person, *zhenren* 真人 (Graham, 1989; Kohn, 2009), together with strong hints about how, and whether, such a person can be taught. Reading these hints as a pedagogy is an interpretive act, but it is a warranted one, because the texts are preoccupied with a question that is at bottom educational: how does a person come to act rightly and live well, and what is the place of learning in that coming.

The *Daodejing* is famously suspicious of learning of the ordinary kind. Its second chapter says that the sage manages affairs through non-action, *wu-wei* 無為, and conducts a teaching that is without words, *bu yan zhi jiao* 不言之教 (Ziporyn, 2023; Kohn, 2009). Its twentieth chapter opens by advising the reader to cut off learning and so be free of worry. Its nineteenth chapter urges discarding sagacity and cleverness, and holding instead to the uncarved block, *pu* 樸, the image of unworked simplicity that runs through the text. And its forty-eighth chapter, quoted already, sets the pursuit of learning, which increases daily, against the pursuit of the Way, which decreases daily until it reaches non-action (Ziporyn, 2023; Henricks, 1989). The verbs matter. Where the Gurukul's student fills and internalizes, the *Daodejing*'s adept subtracts and unlearns. What is subtracted is not information as such but the accumulated distinctions, preferences, and contrivances that, on this view, separate a person from the spontaneous operation of the Way. To learn is to acquire; to follow the Way is to release.

The key term is *ziran* 自然, literally self-so or so of itself, the spontaneous, uncoerced way things are when nothing is forced upon them, and its practical correlate *wu-wei*, action that does not strive against the grain of things. Edward Slingerland has shown that *wu-wei*, best rendered as effortless action rather than literal inaction, functions across early Chinese thought as an ideal of unselfconscious, perfectly responsive activity, and that it carries a characteristic paradox: one cannot simply try to be effortless, since trying is itself a kind of effort (Slingerland, 2003). This paradox is, among other things, a pedagogical problem. If the goal is a spontaneity that deliberate striving only obstructs, then the ordinary model of teaching, in which a student consciously applies rules received from a teacher, cannot be the whole story. Something other than rule-following has to be cultivated.

The *Zhuangzi* explores this problem through stories of skill. In Cook Ding's story, a butcher carves an ox with such ease that his blade seems to find the natural openings in the joints of its own, and after nineteen years, its edge is as sharp as when it's left though whetstone. He explains that he has left mere skill behind and now proceeds by a kind of spirit, following the animal's given structure rather than hacking at it (Ziporyn, 2020). Although the passage is sometimes interpreted as a fable of *wu wei*. It is also a parable of learning: mastery in this context refers to a changed way of seeing and moving that has been developed through extensive practice and is no longer able to be articulated consciously. A second story makes the point about words explicit. The wheelwright Bian, working in the courtyard below a duke who is reading a book of the sages, dares to tell the duke that what he reads is the dregs and leavings of dead men, because the real knack of his own craft, the exact feel of a chisel that is neither too loose nor too tight, is something he cannot put into words and cannot even teach his own son (Ziporyn, 2020). The essential knowledge is embodied and untransferable by language. Books preserve only the residue.

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If the *Daodejing* and the skill stories emphasize unlearning and embodiment, a third strand of early Daoist thought describes a positive discipline of the inner life. The *Neiye* 內業, or Inward Training, a set of rhymed verses that Harold Roth has argued represents the earliest stratum of Daoist self-cultivation, describes practices of aligning the body, regulating the breath, and stilling the mind so that the vital energy, *qi* 氣, and the numinous clarity it carries can gather and remain (Roth, 1999). This is not the accumulation of doctrine but the cultivation of a state, and it is taught less through explanation than through instruction in what to do with one's posture, breath, and attention. The *Zhuangzi* has its own name for the culmination of such practice, *zuowang* 坐忘, sitting in forgetfulness, in which the adept lets fall limbs and body, dismisses perception and intellect, and merges with the great thoroughfare (Ziporyn, 2020; Kohn, 2001). Forgetting is here an achievement, the fruit of practice rather than its failure. The *Zhuangzi* offers a companion image in the fasting of the mind, *xinzhai* 心齋, which Confucius, cast as a Daoist teacher in one of the book's dialogues, describes to his disciple Yan Hui: do not listen with the ears but with the mind, and then not with the mind but with the *qi*, until the self is emptied and made ready to receive (Ziporyn, 2020). Hollowing oneself out is the instruction, not learning a method. Throughout, the subtraction vocabulary reappears: the skilled progresses by letting go.

This portrait is kept honest by two requirements. First, the Daoist mistrust of learning is not a rejection of all discipline; rather, it is a mistrust of a specific type of learning, the acquisition of conversational distinctions and ingenious tactics. The inner development texts outline rigorous routines, while the talent stories detail years of effort. Daoism unlearns, but it does so by practicing its own discipline. Second, the later Daoist tradition, as it organized into movements and monasteries, developed canons, ordination ranks, and structured curricula that look, from a distance, not unlike the graded studentship of the Gurukul (Kohn, 2001; Komjathy, 2007, 2013). The early texts' images of effortless spontaneity were, in practice, approached by long and formal training. I will return to what this complication does to the comparison.

Convergences: a shared grammar of cultivation

Set the two portraits beside each other and four shared commitments stand out. None of them is a vague resemblance; each can be tied to specific features of the texts.

The first is that education aims at the transformation of the person, not the transfer of information. The Gurukul's recitation is in the service of a self-knowledge that recitation alone cannot produce, and the *Chāndogya Upanishad*'s story of the proud Śvetaketu is a warning against confusing the two (Olivelle, 1996). The Daoist adept's goal is likewise a transformed mode of being, the effortless responsiveness of the sage, and not a stock of propositions (Slingerland, 2003). Both traditions would regard a student who had acquired much information but had not been changed by it as having missed the point. This is what Gowans's category of self-cultivation captures, and what current talk of learning outcomes, measured as retained and reproducible content, tends to miss (Gowans, 2021).

The second is the centrality of the realized teacher and the personal, embodied character of transmission. In the Gurukul the student does not enroll in a course; the student attaches to a *guru* and lives in relation to a lineage, a *paramparā*, receiving what is passed hand to hand. The Gita formalizes the posture this requires, the prostration, questioning, and service of the fourth chapter (Malinar, 2007). In Daoism the corresponding figure is the sage or authentic person, and the corresponding scene is the encounter, often oblique and unsettling, between a master and a would-be disciple that recurs throughout the *Zhuangzi*. The wheelwright's confession that he cannot teach his craft even to his son states the underlying principle in its sharpest form: what matters most passes not through words but through presence and practice (Ziporyn, 2020). The relationship is not a museum piece: the guru-shishya bond persists as a living form of mentorship and has recently been offered as a model even for the training of scientists (Behl & Pattiaratchi, 2023). Both traditions, in other words, treat the teacher as an embodiment of what is to be learned rather than a conduit for content, and both treat the relationship, not the syllabus, as the medium.

The third convergence is that nature is a teacher and not merely a setting. Satyakāma learns the quarters of *brahman* from a bull, a fire, and two birds while alone with the cattle, and returns radiant with a knowledge no human gave him (Olivelle, 1996). The idealized Gurukul sits in the forest, among rivers and hills, so that the student learns from living things as well as from the teacher. Daoism makes the natural world central in a different key. The *Daodejing* takes water as its recurring image of the highest good, the soft that overcomes the hard and seeks the low places that people disdain and takes the uncarved block and the newborn as images of the state to be recovered (Ziporyn, 2023). The sage learns by attending to how things are of themselves, following the grain rather than imposing upon it, as Cook Ding follows the structure of

the ox (Ziporyn, 2020). Livia Kohn has drawn out how thoroughly Daoist cultivation is imagined as an ecology, a matter of aligning the individual life with the patterns of the wider world (Kohn, 2001; Girardot et al., 2001). Where a modern school treats the natural world as a subject to be studied in a classroom, both of these older traditions treat it as a party to the teaching. The intuition is not unique to Asia; ethnographers of other cultures have likewise described landscapes that instruct those who dwell in them with attention (Basso, 1996).

The fourth convergence concerns the goal. Neither tradition understands education as preparation for a livelihood or as the earning of a rank, and both would find the modern equation of schooling with credentialing strange. The Gurukul's declared end is *mokṣa*, liberation, or in the widely repeated maxim the knowledge that liberates, *sā vidyā yā vimuktaye*; the disciplines of memory and conduct are steps toward a freedom that lies beyond them. Life in accordance with the method, the peace and freedom of *wu-wei* and *ziran*, and a method of being at rest in the world rather than a collection of achievements to showcase other Daoist aim. In both cases, the student's transformation serves as the yardstick for education, and its goal is not employment but freedom or harmony. Of the four convergences, this common refusal to reduce learning to utility is the one that most directly addresses current dissatisfaction.

Divergences: building up and paring down

Although the convergences are true, true they shouldn't be let too obscure and equally real difference. When it comes to how cultivation effects a person's reservoir of knowledge, the two traditions go in different paths. Classical Daoism eliminate what the Gurukul adds.

Consider the text location. The core text of Gurukul is revelation or *kruti*, which must be preserved with such precision that the tradition created duplicate recitation techniques to ensure it (Scharfe, 2002). The 1st and most difficult task for the pupil is to fully commit this text to memory. In contrast, the early Daoist saw the literature as a distraction at worst and a guide at best. The *Daodejing* begins by stating that the Way that can be stated is not the constant Way, and the wheelwright refers to the book of sages as the "dregs of dead men" (Ziporyn, 2020, 2023). While one tradition emphasizes word preservation as the primary discipline, another cautions that words are exactly what one must see through. This is a significant method difference. It reflects opposed judgments about whether the accumulated deposit of a tradition is the vehicle of the highest knowledge or an obstacle to it.

Consider, next, structure and spontaneity. The Gurukul orders life into stages and days into duties; its student is bound by vows, timetables, and a long deferral of ordinary life. The discipline is deliberate, cumulative, and externally patterned. Daoism's ideal, by contrast, is *ziran*, the spontaneous, and *wu-wei*, the effortless, and its texts are full of suspicion toward exactly the kind of contrivance that structured discipline represents. The *Zhuangzi*'s opening chapter celebrates free and easy wandering, *xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊, an image of unconstrained movement that is hard to reconcile with a fixed curriculum (Ziporyn, 2020). Even granting that Daoist practice has its own discipline, the direction of that discipline is toward the removal of contrivance rather than its accumulation, whereas the Gurukul's discipline builds an ever more elaborate formation.

Consider, finally, the treatment of duty. The *Bhagavadgītā* makes the disciplined performance of one's proper action, *svadharma*, central; the student's whole formation is an apprenticeship in doing what one ought without attachment to reward (Malinar, 2007). Classical Daoism is famously cool toward this vocabulary of duty and role. The *Daodejing* regards the elaboration of moral rules as a symptom of decline from the Way rather than a path back to it, and the *Zhuangzi* delights in figures who ignore social expectation entirely. Where the Gita sanctifies duty, the Daoist texts would loosen its grip.

Once the contrast has been created, it is worthwhile to complicate it right away, as here is where the comparison truly shines. The conflict between building up and paring down is not absolute; rather, it is a difference in focus and direction. The Gurukul progresses, but it does so in the direction of a self-realization that the Upanishads maintain lies beyond all the information that has been acquired; at its horizon, it also requires the student to let go of pride in mere knowledge (Olivelle, 1996). Daoism pares down, but through disciplines of practice that are themselves demanding and, in the organized tradition, through canons and graded training that accumulate in their own way (Kohn, 2001; Komjathy, 2007). Each tradition contains a countercurrent to its dominant motion. What the comparison reveals is not two opposed doctrines but two ways of weighting a tension that both traditions feel, between the learning that forms a person and the learning that must finally be transcended for the person to be free. Daoism leans on the second pole and cannot exist without the first, whereas the Gurukul leans on the first and extends for the second.

What the present could and shouldn't take

These days, these traditions, a frequently brought up in conversations about educational reform, typically under the categories of experiential, holistic, or contemplative learning. Frequently, the innovations are ambiguous. It is important to be clear about what the comparison does and does not truly license.

The comparison reveals four commitments that are truly portable and shared. The first is that education only accomplishes half of its goals if it modifies a student's knowledge without altering their identity. This idea is not new to the contemporary West, it is similar to what David Kolb subsequently described as a cycle in which concrete experience and reflection remake the learner, and what John Dewey meant by education as the reconstruction of experience (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). The Gurukul and the Daoist writings, which maintain that transformation rather than retention is the measure, provide that idea a longer history and a more pointed edge. The second is that what the syllabus cannot convey is carried by teaching relationship. In contrast to the instructional paradigms that treats the teacher as interchangeable and the content as fully specifiable in advance, both traditions find the crucial transmission in a sustained human interaction and an embodied practice (Behl & Pattiaratchi 2023). The third is that the natural world belongs inside education rather than outside it, as a teacher and not only a topic, but a commitment also that current environmental and place-based pedagogies are recovering and that both traditions can be read as having anticipated (Gruenewald, 2003; Basso, 1996; Girardot et al., 2001). The fourth is that both traditions would reject the reduction of education to job training, and their rejection serves as a tool for anybody attempting to make the case that education serves goal outside of workforce (Nussbaum, 2010).

Additionally, the contrast itself teaches a more specific lesson. In addition to describing two traditions, the buildup and pare down structures identify two requirements for any education, and the comparison implies that both are necessary for a quality education. The bloated learning that Uddālaka criticizes and his son is the result of a purely cumulative paradigm, all filling and no emptying. There is nothing to let go of a total subtractive model, which is all letting go and no formation. Read together, they caution against the modern tendency to treat education as accumulation alone, and against the equally modern romance of unstructured discovery that dispenses with formation. The interesting position is the one that holds both motions in tension, and each tradition, taken alone, tends toward one of them.

None of this warrants the wholesale adoption of either model, and it is important to say why, because the contemporary literature that praises these traditions rarely does. The Gurukul, historically, restricted Vedic studentship by caste and by gender; the exact preservation of the Veda was the prerogative of a narrow group, and the exclusion of others was not incidental to the system but written into it (Scharfe, 2002; Olivelle, 1993). To recommend the Gurukul as a model without confronting this is to recommend an idealization that never existed for most people. The master-disciple relationship that both traditions prize is also a relationship of steep authority, and traditions organized around the near-total submission of the student to the teacher have their well-known pathologies, from the suppression of dissent to outright abuse. Even the reverence for nature can shade into a quietism that mistakes acceptance of the given for wisdom; scholars of Daoism have rightly asked how far its ecological reputation is earned by the texts and how far it is read back into them by modern readers looking for an environmental ethic (Girardot et al., 2001). The honest lesson is not that the world should return to the Gurukul or take up the way of the sage, but that these traditions worked out, with unusual seriousness, a set of questions that modern education has largely stopped asking: what is a person for, what does it mean to be formed, and how is anything that matters really passed from one human being to another.

Conclusion

Nothing in the early record indicates that the Gurukul and traditional Daoism were aware of one another; they arose in different worlds and responded to different cosmologies. When seen as educational ideas, they have a common grammar. Both view education as a means of transforming the whole person; they entrust this transformation to embodied practice and realize teacher rather than to a curriculum; they involved the natural world in the teaching process; and they define education's horizon on liberation or harmony rather than utility. They deviate in a way that is more instructive than a straightforward antagonism on this common basis. The Gurukul cultivates the belief that knowledge is what liberates through stages discipline and cumulative textual mastery. In accordance with the Daodejing's advice that the pursuit of the Way advances by daily decline towards non action, classical Daoism cultivates by paring down. However, each incorporates the motion of the other as a counter current, so that the difference is one of weighting rather than kind. Together, the pair describes the two movements; formation and release, that

every real teaching must somehow incorporate. This comparison is intended to provide a clearer understanding of what both traditions were attempting to accomplish and offer tension in the concept of education that they helped bring into focus, rather than making a claim that one tradition is correct or advocating for the current world to follow either. If there is a lesson to be learned, it is a small one. The older traditions recognized, in their many languages, that the totality necessitates both an education that only fills and an education that only empties ..

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