

Beyond the Warring States: The First World War and the Redemptive Critique of Modernity in the Work of Du Yaquan (1873–1933)

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Abstract

The intellectual impact of the First World War in China is often understood as having led to a disenchantment with the West and a discrediting of the authority of “science”, while at the same time ushering in a renewed sense of cultural as well as national “awakening”. Important developments such as the May Fourth Movement, the rise of Chinese Marxism, and the emergence of modern Confucianism have become integral parts of the narrative surrounding the effects of the “European War” in China, and bear witness to the contested relation between tradition and modernity in twentieth-century Chinese thought. Through a case study of a number of wartime and post-war texts written by the “cultural conservative” thinker and publicist Du Yaquan (1873–1933), this paper tries to draw attention to the complexity and occasional ambiguity of responses to the “Great War” in modern Chinese intellectual history. More specifically, the following pages offer an analysis of Du’s critique of “materialism” in the context of his quest for social freedom and cultural continuity, his enduring commitment to scientific notions of social evolution and political governance, and his approach to the relations among war, the nation-state, the individual, and the international interstate order developed against the background of the First World War.

Keywords: First World War, modern Chinese intellectual history, Du Yaquan, war, nationalism, science

Onkraj vojskujočih se držav: prva svetovna vojna in odrešilna kritika modernosti v delu Du Yaquana (1873–1933)

Izvleček

Vpliv prve svetovne vojne naj bi na Kitajskem v intelektualnem smislu pripeljal do razočaranja nad Zahodom in do diskreditacije avtoritete »znanosti«, hkrati pa naj bi povzročil obnovljen občutek kulturnega in narodnega »prebujenja«. Pomembni dogodki, kot so četrtomajsko gibanje, vzpon kitajskega marksizma in pojav modernega konfucijanstva, so postali sestavni deli pripovedi o učinkih »evropske vojne« na Kitajskem ter pričajo o problematičnem odnosu med tradicijo in modernostjo v kitajski misli 20. stoletja. S

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pomočjo študije primera številnih vojnih in povojnih besedil »kulturno konservativnega« misleca in publicista Du Yaquana (1873–1933) članek poskuša opozoriti na kompleksnost in občasno nejasnost odgovorov na »veliko vojno« v moderni kitajski intelektualni zgodovini. Rečeno natančneje, naslednje strani ponujajo analizo Dujeve kritike »materializma« v kontekstu njegovega iskanja družbene svobode in kulturne kontinuitete, njegove trajne zavezanosti znanstvenim pojmom družbenega razvoja in političnega upravljanja ter njegovega pristopa k odnosom med vojno, nacionalno državo, posameznikom in mednarodnim meddržavnim redom, ki so se vzpostavili v ozadju prve svetovne vojne.

Ključne besede: prva svetovna vojna, moderna kitajska intelektualna zgodovina, Du Yaquan, vojna, nacionalizem, znanost

There is hardly any difference between the situation in the age of the Warring States and the present day anymore. (Du 1918b, 364)

Introduction: The “Great War” in China as Event and Narrative

There is an oft-quoted saying by the French poet and essayist Paul Valéry (1871–1945) according to which the First World War confronted humanity with the fact that civilizations too are mortal beings (Valéry 1977, 94).¹ In the context of the intellectual history of modern China, it might be more accurate to say that in the wake of the war, Chinese thinkers learned that Western civilization in particular was mortal, if not already moribund. This at least is how the story was and still is often framed: the post-war period in China was one of national as well as cultural “awakening” (*juewu* 觉悟) (see Wang 2016, 41–48), and entailed a call for nothing less than a “liberation from the West” (Zheng 2011).² Generally speaking, the discourse surrounding the impact of the First World War on China hinges on fluid terms such as “civilization” and “culture”, and draws heavily on dramatic metaphors of “death”, “awakening”, and “rebirth”. Perhaps this already indicates that the war does not figure so much as a factual event in this context, but rather as a narrative structure, one allowing for a decoupling as well as recombination of discursive elements from historically and culturally distinct traditions, at least on a more abstract level.

1 What is usually ignored however is that Valéry’s melancholy diagnosis is followed by a celebration of the “European genius” in the second part of his text.

2 More precisely, Zheng Shiqu 郑师渠 understands such “liberation” as coinciding with an end of the normative appeal of capitalism and the rise of historical materialism, as if the social reality of the war had opened up the cracks in the ideological superstructure of the New Culture Movement necessary for Chinese Marxism to impose itself.

Admittedly, the horror of trench warfare, massive civilian casualties, and unimaginable destruction during the “Great War” may seem to rail against the adoption of such a dispassionate approach. However, we are not, in my view, merely dealing with a stubborn indifference to the cruelty and contingency of historical events which always threaten to shatter the crystal palace of philosophical abstraction. In retrospect, we can clearly see that the brutal reality of armed conflict did not prevent Western as well as Chinese thinkers from approaching the struggle between the great powers as an opportunity for reassessing their respective traditions as well as the prospects for a possible encounter or reconciliation between them. In turn, such a rethinking was seen as a response to very real and pressing socio-political issues. After all, as the historian James Q. Whitman claims, in the modern conception of war, armed conflicts are supposed to deliver a “verdict”, in the sense that “victory in war either proves or legitimates a certain cultural, moral, or metaphysical value” (De Warren 2014, 727).

To be sure, the many problems besetting the embattled nations were widely reported in Chinese media (Sachsenmaier 2007, 118), even if the First World War seems not to have been primarily approached from a “phenomenological” standpoint focused on the lived experience of soldiers and civilians on the frontlines by most Chinese thinkers. Travel journals and the reports of Chinese living in Europe at the time and published after the war contain detailed eyewitness accounts which offer a more personal and lively counterweight to the somewhat dreary and repetitive discourse on the “Decline of the West” often associated with this period.³ As Eugene W. Chiu 丘为君 indicates, while the Chinese experience of the “European War” (*Ouzhan* 欧战), as it still sometimes referred to in China, was at first characterized by a certain detachment, the mass of reports and analyses in journals and newspapers allowing the events on the Western front to be approached as a gargantuan “text”, Chinese commentators gradually shifted their attention to the actual living conditions of common people caught up in the war (Chiu 2005, 94, 118).

Just as importantly, many if not all intellectuals in China were highly concerned with how the situation in Europe would impact the East-Asian context, especially after Japan (aided by Great Britain) started moving in on Germany’s concessions in Shandong province. As such, they were hardly unaware of the global dimension and broader geopolitical implications of what was, after all, an increasingly worldwide conflict. What is crucial to point out, however, is that more philosophically minded observers approached the war not so much as a factual occurrence, but rather from a more macroscopic perspective, that is to say, as an epochal event

3 Professor Jing Chunyu 景春雨 at Shanghai University’s Department of Literature is currently involved in a study of Chinese accounts (by figures as diverse as businessmen and novelists) of their wartime experiences in France.

(in a quasi-Badiouian sense) necessitating an “awakening” and a retrospective insight into its larger historical and cultural causes and conditions. China’s definitive loss of Shandong to Japanese imperialist ambitions following the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919 obviously played an important role in this respect.

As Du Yaquan’s 杜亚泉 (1873–1933) statement which serves as an epigraph to my paper indicates, the causes and conditions of the First World War were not necessarily sought in the recent past alone. For Du, chief editor of the influential journal *Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志) between 1911 and 1920,⁴ the social and ideological upheaval characteristic of the modern era could in some sense be seen as entailing a return to the political chaos and intellectual confusion (or, in positive terms, richness and ferment) of the Warring States period (481–221 BCE) in Chinese history.⁵ As anyone familiar with the development of traditional Chinese philosophy knows, such an identification should not only be read in a negative sense, since this period is also the origin of the “hundred schools” of pre-Qin thought. More to the point, as Nicolas De Warren notes with respect to the philosophical response to the war in Europe, it is easy to forget that when the First World War broke out, it was also greeted with a certain sense of enthusiasm by some thinkers, as an event harbouring the potential for a social revolution and “destructive renewal” of the world within itself

4 Du had *de facto* already been in charge of the journal’s affairs since 1909, see Wang (2016, 5).

5 The analogy between the Warring States period and the modern world order following the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) and the collapse of the *tianxia* 天下 (“all-under-heaven”) paradigm became an even more prevalent theme during the Second World War with the appearance of the so-called “Warring States Faction” (*Zhanguo ce pai* 战国策派), a group of intellectuals (most of them Tsinghua University graduates) associated with the bimonthly journal *Zhanguo ce* 战国策, which was published in the beginning of the 1940s and was followed up by an eponymous supplement to the Chongqing-based newspaper *Dagongbao* 大公报. Common themes in the writings of “Warring States” intellectuals were a reappraisal of the philosophy of Nietzsche (and German culture in general), a tone of militarist nationalism, and a defence of “hero worship”. He Lin 贺麟 (1902–1992), often credited with having been the first to use the expression “New Confucianism”, was also counted among the ranks of the “Warring States Faction”. For more information, see Fung (2010, 120–26). A representative figure of this relatively short-lived current of thought, which came to be condemned as “fascist” on the mainland after the founding the People’s Republic, was the Shakespeare specialist Lin Tongji 林同济 (1906–1980), in whose article “The Recurrence of the Age of the Warring States (*Zhanguo shidai de chongyan* 战国时代的重演)” many of the themes mentioned in the above are joined together. In this text, Lin makes it clear that the idea of the “Warring States” refers to a universal phase in the history and socio-cultural evolution of different societies (each culture having a distinct *Gestalt*, *tixiang* 体相). As such, it denotes a stage of total warfare (*quantizhan* 全体战), where every single thing and person is mobilized for the sake of war, a process Lin sees as being epitomized by the Qin dynasty which unified China at the end of the Warring States period in 221 BCE. For Lin, war was thus not something to be solved or prevented, but rather embraced as a means for the self-assertion of the Chinese nation (see Lin 1983, 443–44).

(see De Warren 2014, 716).⁶ Likewise, in China, figures as diverse as the radical intellectual Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879–1942) and the more moderate and reconciliatory Du Yaquan saw the Great War as a tragic manifestation of the patriotism of the citizens of European nations. As such, it was also an opportunity to reflect on what they perceived to be the lack of patriotic spirit among their compatriots and raise the Chinese nation from its state of slumber and stagnation (see Zheng 2011, 70–71; Zhang 2016, 113).⁷ As Du wrote, in biologicistic terms which I will further explore below,

the mind of organisms is always stimulated and aroused to action by impressions coming from its surroundings. The same applies to the people of a country (*guomin* 国民). Our self-absorbed and protective compatriots have remained in a state of stagnation for thousands of years due to a lack of stimuli from the outside world. (Du 1914b, 187)

Additionally, there was a perhaps surprising amount of Germanophile sentiment among Chinese intellectuals after the war broke out, at least until China officially declared war on Germany in 1917. Contributors to the flagship journal of the New Culture Movement *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian* 新青年), such as Chen Duxiu saw the Germans as a “springtime people” (*qingchun zhi guomin* 青春之国民), whose cultural energy they contrasted with that of older and “decaying” European nations, most notably France, as the birthplace of a revolution that had failed to make good on its promises and normative demands on a global scale (see Zhao 2017, 109–12; Zhang 2016, 112).

In more general terms, a relatively positive appraisal of the intellectual impact of the war is still seen among contemporary Chinese observers. The Taiwanese scholar Edward W. Chiu, for instance, presents the Great War as a veritable catalyst for an “Enlightenment” in China (Chiu 2005). The mainland Chinese historian Zheng Shiqu 郑师渠 has argued that these dramatic historical events allowed the West to overcome an arrogant and exaggerated belief in the merits of its own civilization, while at the same time freeing Chinese thinkers from decades of self-depreciation and feelings of cultural inferiority (Zheng 1997, 213–14). Similarly, Xu Guoqi, a historian who has done much to draw attention to the neglected role of China in the First World War, characterizes the latter as a “vehicle for China’s

6 Some scholars believe that the First World War played a considerable role in the already emerging rift between continental and analytical philosophy, and served as a catalyst for the closely related decline of British Idealism after the latter’s German Idealist sources fell into disrepute. (See Vrahimis 2015, 84–93, and Morrow 1982)

7 A few months after the armistice, Du wrote a short article outlining the various “benefits” (*liyi* 利益) China had gained during the conflict in predominantly pragmatist terms (Du 1919b).

transformation, renewal, and regeneration” (Xu 2005, 10). As he puts it, “the war provided the momentum and the opportunity for China to redefine its relations with the world through its efforts to inject itself into the war and thus position itself within the family of nations” (ibid., 9). While such arguments are probably intended to be descriptive rather than ideological, it should at the same time remind us of the importance of carefully considering in what sort of narrative the Chinese response to the war is framed and retold. According to Dominic Sachsenmaier, already at the time “a variety of groups in China, from free-trade liberalists to early Marxists (...) saw the Great War as part of a teleological history” (Sachsenmaier 2007, 120). In Xu Guoqi’s opinion, the ultimate explanation behind China’s apparent eagerness to join the war effort is to be found in what he calls the Chinese “obsession” (Xu 2005, 2) with joining the ranks of the international order, an attitude which supposedly also conditioned the overall response of Chinese intellectuals to the outbreak of the war.

However, if we direct our attention to analyses of the cultural-historical trajectory seen as leading up to the war, specifically those made by thinkers critical of (Western) modernity, a less clear-cut picture imposes itself.⁸ More precisely, Xu Guoqi’s assessment seems to underestimate the extent to which reflections on the war were not only about an imagined and long-awaited convergence between China and the West, and were not merely focused on the prospect of China finally coming into its own as one nation-state among others, but also gave rise to more ambiguous and at times incongruous reflections on the nature and limits of modernity and its political institutions. The intention of this paper is to highlight and explore some of these ambiguities in the writings of Du Yaquan, who is usually labelled as a cultural conservative without further examination of to what degree this is actually true. Before turning to a more detailed analysis of Du’s philosophical reflections on the “Great War” in relation to the question of Chinese modernity, I will proceed by first providing some additional background information that will allow us to get a better picture of the broader cultural impact of the First World War on Chinese intellectual history.

8 For studies on the impact of the First World War on Chinese intellectuals, specifically on cultural conservatives, see Zheng 2002; Zheng 2008; and Sachsenmaier 2007. To date, one of the only analyses of the relation between the war and the emergence of “New Confucianism” in particular (somewhat predictably focused on the debate concerning “science and metaphysics”) is Lei (2015).

Post-war Chinese Discourse on Science and the Shifting Boundaries of the “New”

The above observations indicate that the Chinese response to the Great War, in which China participated as a “forgotten ally” (Alexeeva 2015)⁹ supporting the Allied Forces by dispatching an estimated 140,000 Chinese labourers to the Western Front,¹⁰ has to be framed in a larger historical context. The two Opium Wars and China’s defeat at the hands of Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 had already made it clear that the waning Qing empire needed to adopt modern (especially military) technology. With the increasing implausibility of maintaining a rigid conceptual distinction between a Chinese “substance” (*ti* 体) and a Western “function” or “application” (*yong* 用), the adoption of technology was gradually discovered not be a mere matter of “technique” (*shu* 术) as opposed and inferior to “learning” (*xue* 学), but to involve the appropriation of “science” (*gezhibixue* 格致学, later *kexue* 科学 (see Elman 2004)) as well. In this context, “science” was understood not so much as a mathematized form of objective inquiry, but rather as a much more generally applicable and socially performative “method” and “spirit” (see Luo 2000, 57–66) that would allow China to successfully achieve modernization and position itself in the world as a sovereign nation. As Wang Hui 汪晖 has aptly put it, science thus took on the form of a veritable “moral imperative” (Wang 1989, 23).

Moreover, modernization was seen as something that not only had to occur on an institutional and political level, but also on that of individual virtue, not in the least by radically reinterpreting the relation between the “private” sphere of morality and the “public” domain of politics, a view epitomized by Liang Qichao’s 梁启超 (1873–1929) call for the creation of a “new citizen” or “new people” (*xinmin* 新

9 For Olga Alexeeva (2015, 44), the fact that the design for a grandiose mural entitled *Panthéon de la guerre*, commissioned by the French State while the war was still ongoing as a celebration of all allied nations and their contributions to the envisaged victory, originally included Chinese labourers, only to be replaced by the figures of American soldiers in the final version, symbolizes the fact that the Chinese war efforts were consigned to oblivion in Western historical consciousness.

10 See Xu 2005, 114–54. The Republic of China adopted a strategy known as “labourers in the place of soldiers” (*yigong daibing* 以工代兵), labourers which were recruited and dispatched to Europe through the intermediary of private companies, thus allowing China to retain a semblance of neutrality while still supporting the Allied Forces against Germany. This strategy was devised by Liang Shiyi 梁士诒 (1869–1933), a cabinet minister and a close confidant of Yuan Shikai. Liang, sometimes dubbed the “Chinese Machiavelli”, had already started arguing for the strategic importance of China entering the war at the side of the Allied Forces in 1914. He saw it as a way for China to achieve full recognition as a nation-state, not in the least through a return of German concessions in Shandong. (See *ibid.* 82–83, 87, 90–91) Ironically, most of the Chinese labourers sent to the frontlines were recruited from Shandong province, which was later ceded to Japan at the Paris Peace Conference.

民).¹¹ The growing awareness of the need for science, as the blueprint for culture as a whole, is usually understood as coinciding with an increasing loss of the normative power of the Chinese tradition, particularly of Confucianism, as a model for political governance, communal life, and individual conduct. The failure of the newly founded and politically unstable Chinese Republic to prevent General Yuan Shikai from proclaiming himself emperor in 1915, a move that was backed by Kang Youwei's 康有为 (1858–1927) “Confucian Religious Society” (*Kongjiao hui* 孔教会) which proposed installing Confucianism as a state religion, further fuelled calls for the abolishment of traditions seen as inhibiting the emergence of a “new culture” (*xin wenhua* 新文化) and to what the intellectual historian Luo Zhitian 罗志田 has termed a “worship of the new” (Luo 2017, 1–60).

Within this familiar synoptic account, the period following the First World War is usually interpreted as signalling a shift away from this “worship of the new” and a naïve celebration of all things Western toward a more conflicted and at times syncretistic approach to what became known as the “problem of Eastern and Western cultures” (*dongxi wenhua wenti* 东西文化问题).¹² As far as Du Yaquan for instance was concerned, the war had endowed the seemingly straightforward yet highly changeable and indeterminate terms “old” and “new” with a completely different sense. In his view, the “new”, which had previously more or less meant imitating the West, now had to give way to a different kind of “novelty”, that is to say, to the creation of a genuinely “new” form of culture that would not simply coincide with a one-sided emulation of Western civilization, but combine elements of the “new” and the “old” within itself (see Du 1919c, 401–2). Just as importantly, after the war “the West” ceased to be seen as a consistent totality, but instead began to appear as a force-field of contradictory if not antagonistic forces (see Luo 2017, 250–51). The spectacle of advanced technology being put to the service of relentless slaughter and destruction had caused science to be “put to shame by the cruelty of its applications” (Valéry 1919, 97). In turn, the continuity between “science” and “democracy”, as symbols for the epistemological and institutional requirements of modern society (and quasi-religious objects of faith in the discourse of the New Culture Movement, see Wang 1989, 22–23) was ruptured, in the sense that scientific and technological ingenuity had clearly failed to translate into a rational organization of individual societies and the international order as a whole (see Han 2017). Instead, a gaping chasm had opened up between “force” (*li* 力) and “principle” (*li* 理) (Zhang 2016). The reputation of the sort of social

11 See in particular the chapters “*Lun gongde* 论公德 (On Public Virtue)” and “*Lun side* 论私德 (On Private Virtue)” in Liang (1994, 16–22, 161–94).

12 See Wang Yuanhua (2000) for a good overview focused on the role played by Du Yaquan in particular.

Darwinism previously embraced by many Chinese thinkers suffered considerably in the process (Xu 2018, 163). Additionally, Western philosophers associated with German militarism became symbols of the malaise of modernity and prominent targets of critique.¹³

In a lecture entitled “The Crisis of European Culture and the Direction of China’s New Culture” (*Ouzhou wenhua zhi weiji ji Zhongguo xin wenhua zhi quxiang* 欧洲文化之危机及中国新文化之趋向) from 1922, Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1887–1969) went so far as to claim that continuing to slavishly emulate Western nations after the war would signify the end of culture (*wenhua* 文化) as such, since there would no longer be any “patterns/refinement” (*wen* 文) or “transformation” (*hua* 化) (Zhang 1922, 238) in the first place.¹⁴ To be sure, although it is tempting to be carried along by the sweeping statements many intellectuals made at the time, some nuance and restraint is necessary in this context. This much Zhang Junmai actually indicates himself a little further on in the text of the same speech, when he argues against making simplistic overgeneralizations concerning Western and Chinese cultures. A similar caution should be displayed when it comes to the supposed discrediting of science in post-war China. It is often claimed that the destruction and suffering brought on by the war put a definite end to the optimistic belief in science, the most well-known example undoubtedly being Liang Qichao’s call to awaken from the “dream of the omnipotence of science” following his tour of Europe between 1919 and 1920 (see Zheng 2006).

However, what Wang Hui has called the “community of scientific discourse” (*kexue huayu gongtongti* 科学话语共同体)—a community extending beyond the “scientific community” in the narrow sense, thus including all intellectuals who invoked concepts derived from scientific reasoning or articulated their views by appealing to the discourse of science—managed to far outlive such largely rhetorical attacks. Wang argues that the two world wars did not in fact end up undermining the authority of science, quite to the contrary:

this competitive world scene reinforced sovereign states’ demands for science and technology, further guaranteeing the development of

13 It appears that the wartime and post-war discrediting of Nietzsche as a philosopher of militarism, not in the least by British propaganda efforts which managed to spread the appealing myth according to which every German soldier carried around a copy of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in his backpack instead of the Bible (see Vrahimis 2015, 86), seems to have influenced Chinese thinkers as well. See for example Cai Yuanpei’s 蔡元培 (1863–1940) text “*Dazhan yu zhexue* 大战与哲学 (The Great War and Philosophy)” (Cai 1984, 200–1).

14 For a more detailed study of Zhang Junmai’s understanding of the war, see Ciaudo (2013).

science and technology, professionalization, state control of science and technology, and the dominant position of the scientific worldview. (Wang 2008, 131)

In his view, this dominant position is also reflected in the influential “debate on science and metaphysics” from 1923, a debate in which “metaphysicians” such as Zhang Junmai and Liang Qichao argued for maintaining the proper boundaries between scientific and humanistic modes of reasoning and cast doubt on the applicability of a scientific outlook to the domains of “existence”, “morality”, “culture”, and “politics”, as distinct fields of knowledge and action irreducible to “science”. As Wang Hui emphasizes, the position of the “metaphysical” camp was thus not that of an outright rejection of science, but rather reflected an implicit acceptance of the scientific attempt to arrive at a rational division of labour and functionally differentiated taxonomy of knowledge across fields of learning which could no longer be reconstituted into a coherent whole or an unmediated continuum (see *ibid.*, 132–37).

Crucially, questioning the “omnipotence” of science in the context of the post-war “awakening” to its limitations and pathological consequences almost never came down to a straightforward call for the restoration of traditional forms of knowledge, but rather entailed a shift toward an assertion of the importance and autonomy of other, equally novel fields of knowledge, such as “philosophy”.¹⁵ This much becomes apparent in the following passage from an article Zhang Dongsun 张东荪 (1886–1973) published in Liang Qichao’s journal *Xuedeng* 学灯 (*The Lamp of Learning*) in 1919 in response to Chen Duxiu’s continued pleas in favour of the authority of “Mr. Science” (*Sai xiansheng* 赛先生) and “Mr. Democracy” (*De xiansheng* 德先生):

And now that we have just experienced the anguish and suffering of the war, everyone feels the need to invite Mr. Philosophy (*Fei xiansheng* 费先生, *fei* being the abbreviation for earlier transliterations of the term “philosophy” such as *feilusufeiya* 费禄苏非亚 and *feilusufeiya* 斐录所费亚 before the adoption of the Japanese neologism *tetsugaku/zhexue* 哲学) back in to provide us with a fundamental and peaceful solution. This is because Mr. Philosophy can be of great help in allowing Mr. Science to reach his goal. Moreover, if we as human beings want to attain a more exalted state of existence, we have no choice but to rely on Mr. Philosophy. In sum, if the previous ten years can be described as a dictatorship

15 For more background on the relation between the fields of “science” and “philosophy” in modern Confucian philosophy in particular, see Van den Stock (2016, 197–215).

of Mr. Science, we have now entered the era of a commonwealth of Mr. Science and Mr. Philosophy. (quoted in Dai 2009, 145)¹⁶

Here, “science” and “philosophy” have already become universally applicable categories of knowledge that are no longer constrained by geography, culture, or time and are explicitly framed in relation to the equally universalist desideratum of social freedom (a “commonwealth” instead of a “dictatorship”). Following the abandonment of traditional Chinese taxonomies of knowledge, it would be these universalized terms that would serve as vehicles for the reassertion and renegotiation of cultural particularity. Additionally, we should bear in mind that, at least to some extent, Chinese post-war critiques of science and “Western materialism” echoed the Romantic self-critiques of many European intellectuals at the time (see Zheng 1997, 213; Sachsenmaier 2007, 111). As such, they should not be confused with indiscriminate assaults on Western culture as a whole, but can rather be seen as creative appropriations and reconceptualizations of such auto-critiques.¹⁷ The post-war European interest in Chinese “wisdom”, or the “wisdom of the East” in general, undoubtedly influenced the attitude of Chinese intellectuals toward their own tradition as well.¹⁸ What is also important to remember is that such reappraisals of the value of Chinese culture were not always met with a warm welcome in China. Some like the liberal pragmatist Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962) feared that the protests directed at Western power politics and the perfectly justified critiques of the atrocities of the Great War would degenerate into a renewed Chinese sense of “arrogance” and “complacency”, the Orientalist admiration for China expressed by some Western scholars in his view merely counting as a “temporary psychopathological state” (quoted in *ibid.*, 210).

In any case, as the title of Zhang Junmai’s lecture quoted in the above indicates, what was at stake for Chinese thinkers in their reflections on the war was both

16 In a similar vein, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) would later castigate proponents of the New Culture Movement for having forgotten about “Miss Morality” (*Mo guniang* 莫姑娘). (See Mou 2003, 252)

17 Henri Bergson (1859–1941), one of the thinkers most often invoked by the “metaphysicians” in their critique of scientism during the 1923 debate, was involved in propagandist denunciations of “the mechanization of spirit” (Bergson 1915, 36) he associated with Prussia/Germany and in drawing binary distinctions between the “*élan vital*” of the French people and the mechanistic materialism of Germany. Similarly, on the German side, the vitalist philosopher Rudolf Eucken (1846–1926), another favourite of the Chinese “metaphysicians”, approached the war as a means for the liberation of Germany and German culture.

18 One anecdotal indication for this surge of interest is the fact that no less than eight different German editions of the *Daodejing* 道德经 appeared in the years following the end of the war. (See Zheng Shiqu 1997, 208)

the “crisis” of Western culture as well as the development of a “new culture” for China. The adoption of a civilizational discourse in which a wedge was driven between “novelty” or “modernity” on the one hand and “the West” on the other was a means of articulating this ambiguous and unstable position. In the process, “conservative” critics of “Western” modernity tried to wrest equally “Western” ideologies such as Marxism and socialism from their cultural confines and redefine them as genuinely universal political projects that could draw on, or be reconciled with, the Chinese tradition. As Du Yaquan for one insisted, after the war the “old” Europe had to give way to a new civilization propelled by the rebirth of the “old” culture of China in combination with a “new” (i.e. non-militarist) Western culture. Hence, it is not so surprising to find the “supposedly conservative” Du Yaquan declaring the lower classes of all countries to be the true subjects and victors of the war, and greeting the rise of international socialism with much enthusiasm. In his view, it is only from the perspective of the “old world” of militarism where “right is might” that the end of the war and a farewell to its “instruments of misfortune” (不祥之凶器)¹⁹ could count as defeat instead of a liberation (Du 1919a, 206–8). Du believed the abolition of class differences and economic inequalities to be the only sure means to put an end to military conflict once and for all (see Du 1914b, 191; Du 1918e, 458). His position thus hardly shares anything in common with a straightforwardly conservative withdrawal into already discredited political and ethical models without any regard for the structural features and ideological discourse of modern societies.

The post-war “problem of Eastern and Western cultures” gave rise to heated debates between radical iconoclasts and more moderate thinkers who still believed in the viability of certain aspects of the Chinese tradition. However, both shared a mistrust of the Western powers following the “betrayal” of the Versailles Peace Treaty, which led to student demonstrations and strikes across the whole of China, ushering in what later became known as the May Fourth Movement. As such, they shared a common concern over “culture” (*wenhua* 文化, *Kultur*), and not merely “civilization” (*wenming* 文明, *Civilization*), that is to say, a form of “awakening” and “enlightenment” that would, in one way or another, reflect and serve the particularities of China as a nation, regardless of whether these particularities were understood in a culturally determinate or a more universalist sense (see Xu 2018).

After the Versailles “betrayal”, cultural conservatives had to abandon the notion that Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations counted as an incarnation of the

19 A reference to chapter 31 of the *Daodejing*: “Weapons are instruments of misfortune, such things are always detestable, that is why one who possesses the Dao does not involve himself with them (夫兵者，不祥之器，物或惡之，故有道者不處).”

age-old Confucian idea of *datong* 大同 (“great unity”) (see Xu 2005, 253–54). Nor could Chen Duxiu still speak, as he had done in the period of short-lived enthusiasm immediately following the German defeat, of a “victory of universal principle over power” (公理战胜强权, or, more colloquially: “the victory of right over might”) (quoted in Gao 1999, 9). Instead, Chen had come to terms with the fact that any “universal principle” always remains dependent on the support of political and military power, without which it would remain an easy prey for the powers that be (see Chen 1982). Clearly, then, following the war, both radicals as well as conservatives were engaged in a pursuit of the “new”, that is to say, a different kind of “novelty”, the semantic horizon of which had expanded considerably in the meantime.²⁰

20 In this respect, it is worthwhile considering the work of Ku Hung-Ming (Gu Hongming) 辜鸿铭 (1857–1928), born in the British colony of Penang (in Malaysia) and educated in Edinburgh, who is usually portrayed as the epitome of an arch-conservative “reactionary” and a living fossil from Imperial China. However, a closer examination of one of his books, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, which bears the Chinese subtitle *Chunqiu dayi* 春秋大义 (*The Great Meaning of the Spring and Autumn Annals*) from 1915, partly written in response to the American missionary Arthur Henderson Smith’s (1845–1932) (in)famous *Chinese Characteristics* from 1894, which had remained popular in the first decades of the 20th century, quickly complicates the picture. *The Spirit of the Chinese People* contains a lengthy appendix entitled “The War and the Way Out” (Ku 1915, 147–68) which is interesting to consider in the present context. The importance Ku attached to this essay is apparent from the fact that he already provides a summary of his main argument in the preface to the whole book, which has the ambition of showing his readers the “real Chinaman” and the actual “characteristics” of Chinese civilization. While Ku claims that Chinese civilization is now in a position to “save” the war-torn West, his staunchly “conservative” line of reasoning is full of praise for Germany, which he sees as “the true, rightful, and legitimate guardian of the modern civilization of Europe” (ibid., preface, 15). While he concedes that German militarism is the immediate culprit for the outbreak of the war, Ku argues that the German “worship of might” should actually be seen as a reaction against the “religion of mob-worship” (the subtitle of his essay) he associates with British civilization in particular. As he puts it later on in the main text of the essay itself: “If there is to be peace in Europe, the first thing to be done, it seems to me, is to protect the rulers, soldiers and diplomats from the plain men and women; to protect them from the mob, the panic of the crowd of plain men and women which makes them helpless.” (ibid., 154) He then goes on to argue that the German (over)reaction against “mob worship” can be balanced out and remedied by returning to a Confucian “religion of good citizenship”, that will allow nations to expect absolute loyalty from their subjects, thus giving rise to a “Magna Carta of loyalty” (see ibid., 9–12). Additionally, in Ku’s view, the “mob-worship” on the level of politics had been exacerbated by the “mob rule” of the commodity in the “selfishness and cowardice” of what he calls “the spirit of Commercialism” (see ibid., preface, 18–19). For Ku, then, the problem that surfaced with the war was not the rupture between “science” and “democracy”, or an excess of “Westernization”, but rather the delirious influence exerted by the “mob-worship”, as represented by democratic politics and the capitalist economy, on Western civilization as a whole. While his position clearly contains elements which are straightforwardly identifiable as “conservative”, his radical reinterpretation of Confucianism as simply amounting to a “religion” that can ensure loyalty to the state confronts us with the unwieldiness and indeterminacy of the term “conservatism” in modern Chinese intellectual history which Benjamin I. Schwartz already identified decades ago.

Du Yaquan on War, Materialism, Evolution, and Statehood

In the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to provide more concrete illustrations of the general observations made in the above by analysing a number of Du Yaquan's wartime and post-war writings that are indicative of the complexity of the cultural conservative Chinese response to the First World War. In doing so, I will start by considering the socio-political dimension and significance of his critique of "materialism". Although this type of anti-materialism may at first sight appear to be a hackneyed and predictable theme echoing the *cliché* of a "spiritual East" *versus* a "materialist West", we should bear in mind that it continued to figure prominently in later Republican-era "debates" (literally "wars of opinions/discourses", *lunzhan* 论战), namely those on "science *and* metaphysics" (1923), the applicability of historical materialism and its categorization of the developmental stages of society to Chinese history (from the late 1920s to early 1930s), and the conceptual validity of dialectical materialism *vis-à-vis* formal logic and science (during the first half of the 1930s). Moreover, as I will try to show in what follows, post-war cultural conservative attacks on "materialism" are not to be dismissed out of hand as reactionary gestures drawing on a simplistic and culturalist East-West dichotomy, but have to be understood as part of an intellectual effort to rethink the modern normative requirement of social freedom.

Du Yaquan almost immediately started paying close attention to the "European War" and contributed a significant number of articles to this topic in *Eastern Miscellany*, which became one of the journals providing the most extensive and detailed coverage of the war under his editorial leadership (Chiu 2005, 95–98; Wang 2016, 54). Du wrote a series of reports (*xuji* 续记) on the latest state of affairs concerning the war from 1914 to 1917, which were later collected in a slim volume entitled *A History of Events in the European War* (*Ouzhan fasheng shi* 欧战发生史) published by Shanghai Commercial Press in 1924 (see Chiu 2005, 103). However, it is not these factually oriented and largely descriptive texts, but rather his philosophical analyses of the underlying causes behind the war as well as the latter's broader cultural significance for which Du is still remembered to this day. In a particularly well-known text, entitled "The State of Our Compatriots' Awakening After the End of the Great War" (*Dazhan zhongjie hou guoren zhi juewu rube* 大战终结后国人之觉悟如何) from 1919, Du makes it clear that the war has led to an awareness of the necessity of spiritual as well as material reform on a global level (Du 1919a, 205).²¹ In other words, he is not simply proposing a reassertion of the dominance of "spirit" over "matter" along the lines of Rabindranath

21 The passage in question is sometimes rather misleadingly translated as denoting an opposition between material and spiritual values. (See for example Xu 2018, 164)

Tagore's (1861–1941) triumphalist praise for the putative spiritual superiority of Asia as a whole. In effect, one of the most interesting aspects of Du's writings is the coexistence of culturalist and universalist orientations, which are not always easy to disentangle. Thus, while Du famously described the West as a “dynamic civilization” as opposed to a “static” China, insisting that this is not merely a gradual but a substantial difference, he at the same time took care to note that the lives of a considerable portion of the Western populace were still entirely “static” in nature. Employing the universalist distinction between the urban and rural as metaphors for the tension between tradition and modernity, Du compared his compatriots' pre-war blind admiration for the West to the situation of a farmer or shepherd from the countryside who is dazzled by the hustle and bustle of city life without being aware of all the contradictions and social suffering there (see Du 1916c, 343). As Feng Youlan's 冯友兰 (1895–1990) (see Van den Stock 2016, 144–52) and Liang Shuming's 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) socio-political philosophy (see Van den Stock, forthcoming) as well as the development of Maoism bear out, the deceptively simple binaries of traditional-modern, Chinese-Western, and rural-urban would give rise to varied and by no means straightforward conceptual constellations throughout the subsequent history of modern Chinese thought.

The abovementioned tension between “culture” and “civilization” can also be found in Du Yaquan's critique of materialism. Already a year before the war broke out, Du published a series of three essays bearing the title “On Saving the Nation through Spirit” (*Jingshen jiuguo lun* 精神救国论) in *Eastern Miscellany*. However, in contrast to what the title might suggest, Du does not engage in an indiscriminate attack on the philosophical position of materialism here, but rather targets the latter more selectively and strategically, namely by engaging in an extensive critical overview and discussion of evolutionary theory and social Darwinism. These reflections are explicitly articulated against the background of the rise of European colonial militarism, which Du portrays as an incarnation of the “animal nature” unleashed by the “materialist” view of the world as a struggle for power in which might is right. Du argues that the “materialist” pursuit of “wealth and power” (*fugiang* 富强) and lopsided interpretations of the theory of evolution (*tianyan* 天演)²² were introduced into China at a time when their adverse social consequences had already begun to become evident in the West and a resurgence of “idealist” positions could begin to be discerned (Du 1913, 33–34). In this context, Du explicitly links “idealism” with a certain *voluntarism*, that is to say, a belief in the power of human autonomy and self-determination. In contrast to

22 Du is obviously referring to Yan Fu 严复 (1854–1921) here. Incidentally, the war led to a volte-face in Yan's own attitude toward Western culture and the Chinese tradition at large. (See Luo 2017, 251)

“materialism”, Du saw an urgent need for the pursuit of a social freedom that departs from the irreducibility of the human being and its spiritual-moral capacities. That “idealism” is a very fluid category for Du becomes clear from the fact that it is supposed to include thinkers as diverse as Montesquieu, Hume, and Hegel. Another indication of Du’s association of idealism and materialism with autonomy and heteronomy, respectively, can be found in his analysis of the authoritarian turn in Japanese politics following the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, which Du sees as reflecting a departure from an “idealist” belief in the power of the human mind that was still embraced at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration (see *ibid.*, 37–38).

What Du Yaquan proposes over and against the immoral kind of “materialist” evolutionary theory that had cast the modern world into a merciless struggle for the survival of the fittest is what he calls “social cooperationism” (*shehuixielizhuyi* 社会协力主义) (Du 1915a), a notion inspired by the anarchist Peter Kropotkin’s (1842–1921) idea that “mutual aid” plays an important role in biological as well as social evolution. After the war, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1863–1940) would also describe the victory of the allied forces as coinciding with a triumph of Kropotkin’s ideas over “militarist” Nietzscheanism and social Darwinism (see Cai 1984, 203). Crucially, for Du, “cooperationism” also points toward a future synthesis between nationalism and internationalist pacifism. In his view, such a synthesis had become unavoidable given the increasing economic interdependence between nations in a world governed by military and monetary power (see Du 1918c). Even more importantly, a reconciliation of nationalism and internationalism would ideally serve to prevent events such as a world war from ever happening again. However, invoking the transition from “governing the state” (*zhiguo* 治国) to “pacifying all-under-heaven” (*ping tianxia* 平天下) prescribed in the classical Confucian text of *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大学), Du argues that any future form of “internationalism” would have to be grounded in a prior cooperation between citizens on the level of the nation-state (see Du 1915a, 21–22). The need for attaining a balance between “strength” (*jianqiang* 坚强) as well as “reconciliation” or “harmony” (*tiaohe* 调和), as quasi-cosmological concepts Du primarily deploys in analysing the “phenomenal” (*youxing* 有形) dimension of politics, would first of all have to be realized “internally”, that is to say, inside of a certain nation-state and people, before the latter can attempt to peacefully position itself within an international interstate order (see Du 1916b, 171–73). In short, in the same sense that “inner” moral perfection is the precondition for “outer” social order in the traditional Confucian logic of governance, nationalism counts as the logical precondition for internationalism here.

In Du Yaquan’s view, while China had traditionally been preoccupied with “governing” (*zhi* 治), that is to say, ensuring the general well-being of its own people,

and thus remained relatively indifferent to the possible existence of other states falling outside of the scope of “all-under-heaven” (*tianxia* 天下), it now had to come to terms with a more competitive world-order in which “protecting” (*wei* 卫) the nation had imposed itself as a new and urgent political imperative, all while remaining on guard against a form of militarism that would depart from China’s supposed tradition of pacifism (see Du 1915c).²³ In his own words: “our compatriots should become aware that the existence of the state is a factual and not a conceptual affair, and that its basis of existence is located in military power, and not governance through culture (*wenzhi* 文治, more colloquially: ‘civil administration’)” (Du 1915c, 149). Interestingly enough, Du associates what he takes to be the traditional Chinese focus on “internal governance” (*neizhi* 内治) with an attitude of indifference toward the external material world supposedly found in “Indian contemplative philosophy (印度之潜心哲学)” (ibid., 148). This again indicates that his attack on “materialism” has little or nothing in common with “idealism” as it is defined in more vulgar examples of Marxist intellectual historiography. In contrast, Du’s “idealism” is profoundly activist in orientation and serves as a means of safeguarding the possibility of autonomy in the face of historical processes which are beyond the control of individual human beings. In this sense, before all else, “spirit” serves a symbol for autonomy rather than denoting a specific metaphysical position. Indeed, for Du, the problem lies not so much in the analytical privilege given to the tangible aspects of human existence by materialist theories, but rather in the very notion of ideology and its imposition of misleading abstract requirements on social reality, as the passage below vividly illustrates:

Those who are now propagating various “isms” seem to be begrudge the integratedness (*tongzheng* 统整) of our traditional culture and cannot refrain from engaging in manoeuvres to acquire power and luxurious wealth, using Western thought as a pretext to bring it to ruins (...) Expecting to be saved by these various isms would be like expecting the devil to show us the way into paradise. Oh you demons, the end is upon you! (魔鬼乎，魔鬼乎，汝其速灭)” (Du 1918b, 367)

Despite his frequent appeal to the Chinese tradition, then, Du Yaquan’s position cannot be straightforwardly identified as “conservative”, and does not entail

23 By contrast, in his wartime private correspondence Yan Fu favoured a much more pragmatic and utilitarian approach, in which any moral and normative considerations would have to be temporarily subordinated to the task of saving the nation. Yan argued that China needed to return to the military strength and vigour of the Qin dynasty and the strategic acumen of the Legalist school of pre-Qin philosophy, rather than focus on moral supremacy. Additionally, his observations of the “European War” had led him to the conclusion that the democratic system was hardly conducive to the efficient mobilization of military force. (See Chen 2012, 122–23)

a rejection of the new political form of the nation-state, but rather involves a complex attempt to mediate between tradition and modernity. This is precisely why the term “reconciliation” (*tiaohe* 调和) figures so prominently in his writings on the “problem of Eastern and Western cultures”. Du’s repudiation of social Darwinism is a case in point, since he continues to work under the assumption that there is a strong parallelism and even a continuum between nature and society and that the same force or constellation of forces govern the domains of the physical and the social. The use of physiological metaphors of “anaemia” and a symptomatic “excess of blood” in his post-war diagnosis of the condition of a “static” China and a “dynamic” West (see Du 1916c, 342) already suggests as much.²⁴ These biologicistic metaphors obviously call to mind Chen Duxiu’s call to reinvigorate the “metabolism” of the Chinese body politic with the cells of a new culture and remove its old and “rotten” elements in *A Call to the Youth* (*Jinggao qingnian* 警告青年) from the inaugural issue of *New Youth* in 1915 (see Chen 1915).²⁵ As Du himself put it unambiguously with reference to the question as to whether the current situation of a world embroiled in war can really be blamed on individual states or political parties: “That which governs the tendencies in the world of society is actually no different from the natural forces governing the ten thousand things.” (Du 1917c, 194) This also becomes apparent in a text from 1916, where Du describes the war in cosmological terms as an embodiment of the tension between “love” (*ai* 爱) and “strife” (*zheng* 争) (Du 1916a). Evolution in both the natural and the social world is thus approached as the result of an interplay between contradictory forces such as the centripetal and centrifugal forces in physics (cf. Du 1916b; 1918a). While such an approach seems to shift the burden of accomplishing a transformation of society from the individual to history as a process that escapes the immediate control of nations as well as citizens, Du’s “anti-materialist” leanings leave the door open for the individual (and by the same token, the state) to regain command of its own fate.

The cosmological appropriation of the logic of evolutionary theory sketched in the above has important consequences for understanding Du Yaquan’s approach to the reconciliation of nationalism and internationalism he envisaged against the backdrop of the Great War. Again, for all of his criticism of the social Darwinist sort of “evolution without ethics” (to paraphrase the title of Huxley’s famous book), Du clearly embraces the basic logic of evolutionary thinking in arguing that the

24 In another text, Du argued that civilizations, much like children, have to go through periods of illness in order to develop and be reborn. (See Du 1917b, 346)

25 For an extensive analysis of the notion of “youth” as a symbol for the social change in Republican China, with specific reference to the emergence of the Communist Youth League, see Graziani (2014).

progression from a state of savagery to one of civilization involves a change in the reasons for which war is fought: from a broader historical perspective, Du discerns a progression from the rationale behind warfare which moves from contingent empirical reasons (i.e. immediate bodily needs, in which case wars remain on the level of struggles between animals or squabbles between children), to a calculated consideration of “interests” or “benefit and harm” (*libai* 利害), to finally reach a point where normative and ideological considerations enter the fray, and wars are fought over “right and wrong” (*shifei* 是非), such as for example the American Civil War (see Du 1915b).²⁶ Within this line of reasoning, the Great War counts as an archetypal “war of ideas” (*sixiang zhan* 思想战) over right and wrong, and is not merely a battle between conflicting, unreflective animal instincts. In this sense, we can say that Du’s “conservatism” is one which has already internalized certain “scientific” narratives of historical development that were far from discredited through the event of the war. Rather, the latter provided him with an opportunity to rethink and redeploy these narratives, all while attempting to link them with elements from the Chinese philosophical tradition.

We should bear in mind here that Du started his career as an autodidact intellectual who devoted himself to introducing natural scientific knowledge into China after having abandoned the prospect of pursuing a career as a scholar-official after reaching the entry-level degree of *xiucai* 秀才 (“flowering talent”) in the imperial examination system at the age of 16. Eight years later, in 1898, Du was recruited by Cai Yuanpei, the future president of Peking University who then still served as rector of the Shaoxing Chinese-Western School (*Shaoxing zhongxi xuetang* 绍兴中西學堂) in Zhejiang, to become a teacher in mathematics, meanwhile applying himself to the study of natural scientific subjects such as chemistry, mineralogy, zoology, as well as philosophy, politics, and other “humanist” disciplines, which were more likely still seen as part of the epistemological continuum of what Neo-Confucian thinkers called the “investigation of things” (*gewu* 格物). In 1900, Du founded an academy for the study of science in Shanghai and published the inaugural issue of *Yaquan zazhi* 亚泉杂志, one

26 In an earlier text (Du 1911), invoking the authority of German authors such as Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896) who affirmed the positive significance of war, Du still argued that a people has to possess a certain “martial spirit” (战斗之精神) in order to uphold itself among other nations. Additionally, he presented a typography of various kinds of war, including racial, religious, economic (with colonialism as an example), and political wars. Within the category of “political war”, he further distinguished between “internal” and “external” warfare, the latter being concerned with conquest and control. The category of “internal war” is further differentiated into wars for independence and domination on the one hand, and “purely internal wars” (纯为内战者), that is to say, “revolutionary wars” (革命战争) in the proper sense on the other. Already here, Du is engaging with the question concerning the relation between the “internal” establishment and reform of the nation-state (“revolution”) and the “external” positioning of the state in the global order through war.

of the first Chinese journals devoted to popularizing the natural sciences (with a focus on chemistry), to which he would personally contribute a significant number of texts and translations (from the Japanese) until it ceased publication in 1901. Du invested much of his time and sometimes his own resources in science research and education, as well as to such mundane affairs as a setting up a shop selling laboratory equipment in Shanghai. His endeavours as an author and editor at Shanghai Commercial Press led to the publication of pioneering works such as the *Comprehensive Botanical Dictionary* (*Zhiwuxue da cidian* 植物学大辞典) (1918) and the *Comprehensive Dictionary of Zoology* (*Dongwuxue da cidian* 动物学大辞典) (1923) (see Xie 1988, 8–11). Tellingly, Du's activities toward the spread of scientific knowledge hardly stopped after the war (see Chen, Kang, and Yao 2008, 1046–49). As late as December 1933, a few months before his death, Du put the last touches to the compilation of book entitled *Natural Scientific Terms for Elementary Education* (*Xiaoxue ziran keci shu* 小学自然科词书), an endeavour that would not have made sense if he had lost his faith in science following the war.

Crucially, Du Yaquan's appeal to the authority of "science" also surfaces in his critique of the deficiencies of modern democracy. In Du's view, the majority of the common people want as little as possible to do with politics and remain completely indifferent to the affairs of the state. The Chinese people's overall apathy and lack of knowledge makes them questionable subjects of the "awakening" necessitated by the Great War. As Du put it: "the so-called will of the people is actually so somnolent as to appear involuntary (所谓民意者, 实则为朦胧无意而已)" (Du 1917c, 195). In this sense, it seems that Du expected "Mr. Science" to come to the aid of "Mr. Democracy": in his utopian vision of a future where all nations and military factions will be abolished and national democracies will give way to global socialism, he imagined the emergence of a new social class that would combine specialized scientific knowledge with the practical skills and energetic potential of the labouring population. This activist class of scientists would serve to supplant the apathetic unconscious "will of the people" largely driven by "material" desire instead of rational choice (ibid., 198).²⁷

27 His socialist leanings notwithstanding, Du was highly suspicious of the lower classes in China, who he saw as lacking organization and as not yet having sufficiently internalized the ideals of socialism. Additionally, for Du, the majority of the lower classes in China was to be found not in the industrial proletariat, but rather in its "wandering population" (*yumin* 游民), an indeterminate and unstable mass of people resembling what Marx called the *Lumpenproletariat*, as a reserve army of industrial labour power. Du presented this "wandering population" as a highly dangerous section of society, suffused with resentment they cannot yet canalize in a productive and targeted manner, thus giving rise to uncontrolled outbursts of anger and violence that can never succeed in ushering in positive social change. (See Du 1919a, 211; Wang 2000, 281–82)

Du's cosmological-evolutionary framework for the interpretation of natural as well as social changes provides us with an important clue to the significance of what he defended as the outlook of "continuism" (*jiexuzhuyi* 接续主义) (Du 1914a). From a "continuist" perspective, there is no necessary contradiction between the old and new or tradition and modernity. In socio-political terms, this means that the continuation of the past into the present does not come down to a reactionary attitude aimed at restoring an already defunct social order, but rather embodies a unity of conservatism and progressivism ensuring that national unity is not only safeguarded on a spatial-territorial, but also on a temporal-historical level. As Wang Hui has shown, the questions of national sovereignty and cultural continuity were closely connected in Du's writings (Wang 2016, 60), where the "reconciliation" of the old and the new is presented as being predicated on such a "continuist" attitude. Interestingly enough, whereas Du's 1914 text on continuism written just before the outbreak of the war still called for subordinating the individual to the interests of the state, in his wartime and post-war writings, the nation-state begins to appear as the medium for the reconciliation of opposites, that is to say, as a place where the dialectical interplay between the cosmological forces of the centripetal ("love") and the centrifugal ("strife") as well as the opposition between the private and the public could be balanced out.

In an article from 1917 entitled "On the Boundaries between the Individual and the State" (*Geren yu guojia zhi jie shuo* 个人与国家之界说), Du came to argue that individualism should be reconciled with, and not sacrificed to, nationalism, a position he takes up in opposition to German militarism (Du 1917a, 168). Such a reconciliation involves drawing the proper boundaries between the domain of the individual and that of the state, instead of propagating a straightforward subordination of individual to national interests. At the same time, he assumed that upholding these boundaries could also serve the purpose of preventing individual interests from usurping the public good. Once again, Du's argument is framed within the Confucian logic of the continuity between individual self-cultivation and the governance of the state, with Du invoking a passage from the *Analects* (14.42) which insists on the necessity of "cultivating oneself in order to bring peace to the common people (修己以安百姓)" (quoted in Du 1917a, 167). His line of reasoning thus wavers between the two poles he seeks to reconcile and takes up an ambiguous position in between individualism and nationalism. Du proposes that if individuals are simply sacrificed for the sake of the nation without being given the opportunity to "cultivate themselves", they would in effect cease to be of any use to the state, since they would have no proper self or "personality" (*renge* 人格) to sacrifice in the first place. In his own words: "if we want people to fully devote themselves to the affairs of the state, we have to first allow them

to care for themselves” (ibid.). In his view, top-down government measures have to be supplemented with a “spiritual socialism” (精神上之社会主义) (Du 1919a, 210) on the level of individual morality. It is not clear if this should be read as a defence of individualism *per se*, or merely as a functionalist argument in which individuals must be allowed to develop themselves for the greater good of the state. On the one hand, Du seeks to reaffirm the traditional continuity between “governing the self” (*zizhi* 自治), that is to say, moral autonomy, and “governing the state” (*zhiguo* 治国), while at the same time insisting on the importance of upholding the proper boundaries between state and individual. In short, Du seems to be struggling here with what would continue to be a dominant theme in retrospective evaluations of the New Culture and May Fourth Movement, namely the conflict between the search for “national salvation” and the pursuit of “enlightenment” (i.e. individual autonomy) as Li Zehou 李泽厚 famously, if rather simplistically, put it (see Li 1987). In spite of his rejection of Li’s diagnosis, a very similar conclusion was reached by Gao Like 高力克, who argued that in these movements of “unfinished enlightenment”, “‘individual awakening’ was merely an indirect manifestation of ‘national awakening’” (Gao 1999, 11). Du Yaquan’s historically informed writings on the relation between individual and state can thus be seen both as a precursor to more recent Chinese discourse on the “dialectics of Enlightenment”, as well as a possible resource for comparative philosophical reflections on the possibility of social freedom in the modern world.

Conclusion

The examples given in the above indicate that Du Yaquan did not seek to repudiate, but rather to redeem modernity, as something containing the potential for a “reconciliation” between the past and present, as well as contradictory aspects of intrastate and interstate politics within itself. As such, Du’s critique of evolutionism could go hand in hand with an analysis of war as a quasi-natural catastrophe, one destined to eventually evolve into a vehicle for the attainment of political freedom and economic equality on a global level. Similarly, his condemnation of the economic injustices he saw as the basis of the Great War was accompanied by a strong belief in the ability of industrial capitalism to continue increasing productivity, while redirecting the latter toward the creation of actual material wealth and disentangling it from unequal relations of distribution (see Du 1918e, 459). Perhaps most importantly and timely from our current perspective, in analysing the Great War Du explicitly called for critically reflecting on the limitations and dangers of nationalism, an ideology he tended to present as a necessary evil rather than a positive good, and, paradoxically, as the only means available to China to secure a position within a more long-term historical process leading to the

overcoming of the nation-state (see Du 1917d, 398; 1918d). Rather than simply being concerned with the relation between individual and state in general, the problem for Du would seem to have been that, under the condition of the continuing threat of war and the ever-present possibility of a return to an age of “Warring States”, it is the “individuality” of the state within a competitive global order of nation-states which provides the basis for individual human well-being and the right to subsistence. Within this logic, there is no space of mediation and “reconciliation” between the individual (private) and the social (public) in the absence of the nation-state. Lacking the necessary cohesion and resistance against external aggression, China would become violently assimilated into the economic realm of Western colonialism and lose its autonomy to unbridled and goalless “material” impulses, thus effectively falling back to a more atavistic, pre-normative stage in the evolution of society and being severed from the necessary “continuist” connection to its own tradition. As such, for Du, the “individuality” of the state comes before that of the individual in the strict or ordinary sense, precisely because war has consistently threatened to undercut the already fragile social and moral cohesion of the Chinese people throughout its modern history. While not going as far in his critique of the category of the nation-state as contemporary Chinese intellectuals who advocated reasserting the traditional notion of “all-under-heaven” (*tianxia*), Du’s conflicted attitude toward nationalism is testament to the modern dialectics of autonomy, where the requirements of freedom and autonomy are always caught in a tension between the spheres of the individual, the state, and geopolitical interstate conflicts. By contrast, invocations of the ideal of “all-under-heaven” as a straightforward alternative to the “Western” notion of the state conveniently ignore the fact that the logistics behind the realization of a universalist vision such as that of *tianxia* risk remaining caught up in the geopolitical logic of modernity, that is to say, one of different nation-states ruthlessly competing for the benefits of global capitalism, as the only de facto universality in the contemporary world. Over a century after the armistice, Du’s wartime and post-war writings remind us of the fact that relation between intrastate political freedom and interstate war is not an extrinsic one, and that the historical specificity of this relation should not be left out of the picture in comparative political thought.

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