

SCIENCE LIVES

Einstein goes east

Private travel diaries reveal the physicist's musings and moments of self-reflection

By Andrew Robinson

From 1922 to 1923, Albert Einstein maintained a private travel diary, which is alive with his important and trivial adventures. Notably, however, he failed to record the news that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize.

This omission suggests both confidence in his scientific ideas and a lack of personal vanity but also suggests alienation from normal human emotion: that which he later deprecated as the “chains of the ‘merely personal’” in his *Autobiographical Notes* (1949).

Having recently read the German psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer's book *Physique and Character*, Einstein appears to recognize early in the diary, in a rare moment of self-analysis, that his own character might be defined by “Hypersensitivity transformed into indifference. During adolescence, inwardly inhibited and unworldly. Glass pane between subject and other people. Unmotivated mistrust. Substitute paper world. Ascetic impulses.”

Einstein's travel diaries, kept under wraps during his lifetime, were posthumously quoted in biographies and studies, most extensively in Josef Eisinger's *Einstein on the Road* (2011). In 2012, the entire 1922–1923 diary appeared in translation in volume 13 of *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*. But until now it has not been published as its own, stand-alone book.

The Travel Diaries is a substantially revised version of the 2012 translation that comes with an illuminating introduction and astonishingly comprehensive endnotes by Ze'ev Rosenkranz, senior editor of the Einstein Papers Project and author of *Einstein Before Israel*, which includes his 1923 visit to Palestine.

Einstein's 1922–1923 travels were triggered by a request from a Japanese publisher to give lectures on relativity in Japan. The trip coincided with serious threats to Einstein's safety in Germany from anti-Semitic right-wing forces following the assassination in June 1922 of his friend and fellow Jew, Wal-

ther Rathenau, Germany's foreign minister. Accompanied by his second wife, Elsa, Einstein began his sea voyage in Marseilles in October 1922 and traveled to Japan via the Suez Canal, Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. The pair returned to Germany through Palestine and Spain in March 1923.

Rosenkranz enthuses in a preface, “Albert Einstein's travel diaries are, by far, my favorite documents penned by him. I have always enjoyed his quirky style, his acerbic quips about the individuals he met, and the colorful descriptions of the hustle and bustle in his ports of call.” But then he confesses, “It was only later that I started to notice the more troublesome entries in his journal, in which he, at times, made what amounted to xenophobic comments about some of the peoples he encountered. I began to ask myself: how could this humanist icon be the author of such passages?”

Consider Einstein's entry written in Hong Kong on 10 November after observing the Chinese quarter on the mainland: “Industrious, filthy, lethargic people. Houses very formulaic, balconies like beehive-cells, everything built close together and monotonous. ... Even the children are spiritless and look lethargic. It would be a pity if these Chinese supplant all other races.” Comments Rosenkranz, “It seems clear that Einstein has bought—to some extent—into

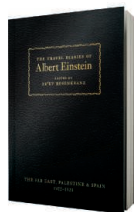
the perceived threat of ‘the yellow peril.’”

Japan, by contrast, pushes Einstein to the opposite extreme. His diary reveals enchantment with the Japanese landscape, houses, temples, people, and painting (if not so much the music). In an article on his impressions written not long before departure, Einstein concludes, “The Japanese rightfully admires the intellectual achievements of the West and immerses himself successfully and with great idealism in the sciences. But let him not thereby forget to keep pure the great attributes in which he is superior to the West—the artful shaping of life, modesty and unpretentiousness in his personal needs, and the purity and calm of the Japanese soul.” Nowhere in 6 weeks of Japanese travels does Einstein—despite his lifelong detestation of German militarism—anticipate Japan's forthcoming slide toward an authoritarian regime, as he did in Weimar Germany.

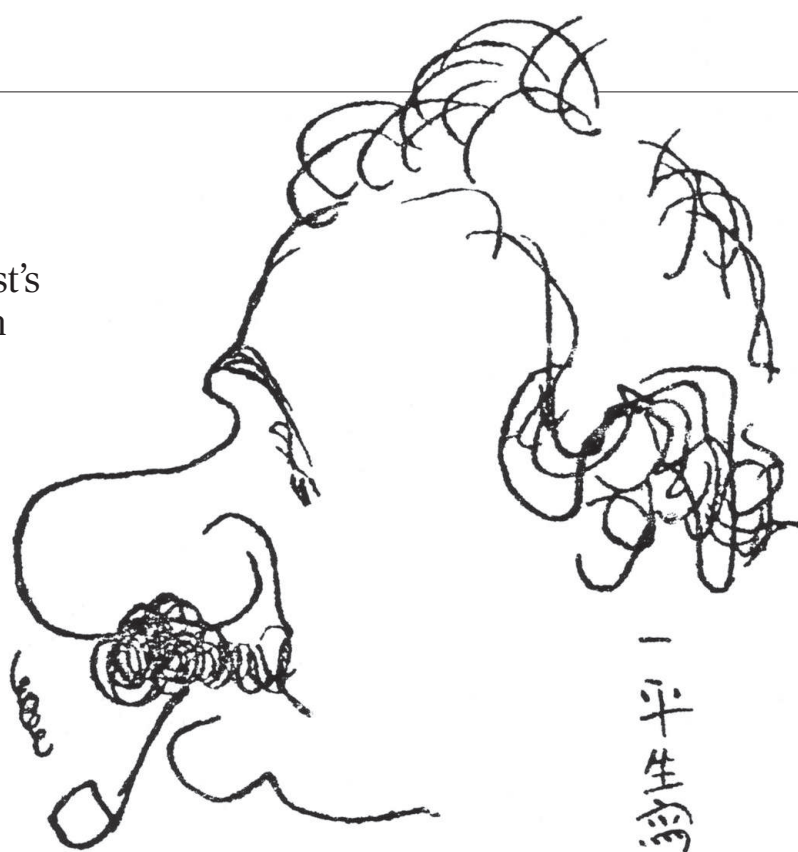
Only later, in Palestine, does Einstein regain a measure of balance. Although moved by his welcome from Jewish settlers, and by his key role in the opening ceremony of the fledgling Hebrew University, he tells his diary on 13 February, “I am wanted in Jerusalem at all costs. ... My heart says yes but my mind says no.” He never returned but worked assiduously for Jewish causes until the 1950s.

Anyone interested in Einstein's complex, sometimes self-contradictory, character will be enjoyably provoked by reading his private *Travel Diaries*. ■

The reviewer is the author of *Einstein: A Hundred Years of Relativity* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2015). Email: andrew@andrew-robinson.org



The Travel Diaries of Albert Einstein: The Far East, Palestine, and Spain, 1922–1923
Ze'ev Rosenkranz, Ed.
Princeton University Press, 2018. 377 pp.



“Albert Einstein or The Nose as a Reservoir for Thoughts,” by the Japanese cartoonist Ippei Okamoto, 1922.

Science

Einstein goes east

Andrew Robinson

Science **360** (6390), 722.

DOI: 10.1126/science.aat4718

ARTICLE TOOLS

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/360/6390/722>

PERMISSIONS

<http://www.sciencemag.org/help/reprints-and-permissions>

Use of this article is subject to the [Terms of Service](#)

Science (print ISSN 0036-8075; online ISSN 1095-9203) is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. 2017 © The Authors, some rights reserved; exclusive licensee American Association for the Advancement of Science. No claim to original U.S. Government Works. The title *Science* is a registered trademark of AAAS.