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**Some Historical Analysis of the Translating,  
Editing, and Publishing Process of the  
Collection of Albert Einstein in China**

**Abstract**

*As in other countries, Einstein has been one of the most famous scientists in China. In 1970's, the three volumes Collection of Einstein in Chinese have been selected, translated and published, which was the main sources for Chinese people knowing Einstein for long time, and even had important ideological influence. However, as the background of it, in China, there were very influential political movements related to criticism of science after 1949, which also influenced the decision, selection, progress and the way of the translating and publishing of Einstein's works. Among the editors and translators, XU Liangying was a special and important person, who was originally a underground revolutionist before establishment of the Republic, and latterly became a historian of science. He spent nearly ten years to finish the most translation when he was a real peasant in countryside and a "righty" because of the "anti-righty" movement. During the translating work and the publication of Collection of Einstein in that special social, cultural and political context then, there were many things worth to look back and analyze their meanings by a historical perspective reflection. Especially, the ideological symbolic implication related to the Einstein has been a very dominant characteristic in the history mentioned here.*

**Key Words**

translating, editing, publishing process, Albert Einstein, China

**Introduction**

Albert Einstein, as the greatest scientist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose image in public will be directly affected by the transmission of his doctrines including his theories of science and his statements on philosophy, society, and politics. However, the transmitting process in China inevitably has involved a lot of complicated factors, for it does not simply spread his thoughts and theories among the public. Through historical analysis of these factors' emergence and existence, we could find that to an enormously influential scientist, his ideological embodiment is indispensable to his image.

To the topic of the Chinese people's contact with and understanding of Einstein, many scholars have researched from various perspectives and themes, for instance, the historical review of the relation between Einstein and China.<sup>1</sup> Hu Dalian's published monograph *China and Albert Einstein: the Reception*

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Dai Nianzu, "Einstein in China – On Einstein's Two Trips via Shanghai during 1922 and 1923 and the Impact of His Theory of Relativity in China", in: Zhao Zhongli &

Liangying Xu (eds.), *Commemoration on the Translated Collection of Einstein*, Shanghai Science and Technology Press, Shanghai 1979, pp. 396–410.

of *this Physicist's and His Theories during 1917–1979*<sup>2</sup> based on his doctoral dissertation, reviews in great detail the process of how Einstein was accepted in China. In addition, there are some other related researches, for example, the historical review of the criticism of Einstein's Theory of Relativity in China.<sup>3</sup>

In China, as to the public understanding of Einstein himself and his theories, apart from the movement of criticizing Einstein in the “Cultural Revolution”, the most immediately influential event is the translation and publication of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* of three volumes. Taking it as a case study and based on some other scholars' study – after I re-read some related materials and interviewed some related people – by making clear the history of the related background, the zigzagging process of the editing and publishing of the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, and the changing evaluations of Einstein, etc., this article is to discover the different ideological symbols constructed on Einstein and their changes in different periods.

### Brief Review of the Related Background

In fact, Chinese people's first contact with Einstein was quite early. Only considering the introduction and discussion of the Theory of Relativity in China, according to some historical research, it might date back to Xu Chongqing's work in 1917. Afterwards, some scientists like Ren Hongjuan also introduced Einstein's Theory of Relativity in the journal of *Science* (a Chinese Journal created in early of last century). At the beginning of the 1920s, there were already three journals published “Special Issue of Theory of Relativity”. In 1922, on his way to Japan to give lectures, Einstein passed by Shanghai twice, during which period, great attention of his Theories was aroused in China, and Einstein himself showed deep sympathy for Chinese people's miserable life.<sup>4</sup> But Chinese people's interest in Einstein was mainly in his scientific theories, esp. the Relativity Theory. As to a comprehensive understanding of Einstein himself, the publication of *Mein Weltbild* in Chinese translation in 1937 was really the first time to make Chinese people get to know Einstein's social and political thoughts. Unfortunately, due to various reasons, including Anti-Japanese War, this publication did not make great impact. A special person we will mention later in this paper, that is, *Xu Liangying*, who had not entered the University yet at that time. According to his recall, he read the book very carefully and arduously, and felt the great impact from Einstein.<sup>5</sup> It could be regarded as a straight significance of the publication of *Mein Weltbild* in Chinese, because without the influence of this book, let's suppose, whether Mr. Xu Liangying would afterwards become the main editor of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* in question might still be a problem under discussion.

After the founding of People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, in different historical periods the change of official viewpoints on and evaluation of science and scientists, esp. in the philosophical and ideological sense, was a greatly important background to the study on the establishment of Einstein's image. In addition to the problems concerning social and political life, philosophy is especially mentioned here, because it has taken a very special position in Chinese ideology for a long time.

It might be a huge task to have a complete review of the changes of the viewpoints on western science and scientists held by the official evaluation system after the founding of PRC. Therefore, the changes reviewed in this space-limited article are just based on several typical events covered by *People's Daily*.

Shortly after the founding of PRC, *the ideologization in science and in the spreading of science* had clearly emerged. For instance, in 1952 Gong Yuzhi published an article named “Correcting the Tendency of Deviating from Politics and Reality in Science Journals”, which criticized the comprehensive science journal *Science Bulletin*, edited and issued by Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), and in which it mentioned that

“... *Science Bulletin* attached importance to its task of introducing overseas sciences, and introduced the science conditions in some capitalist countries. Of course, it was completely allowed. But in such introduction, we should hold on to our own standpoint, never following the capitalists and never propagandizing their retroactive politics. Unfortunately, *Science Bulletin* often made mistakes in this aspect.”

And it suggested that “Chinese Academy of Sciences should strengthen its leadership over *Science Bulletin*, and make it become a science journal politically”.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the editors of *Science Bulletin* immediately reflected on their work, and published their reflection report on *People’s Daily*. The supervisors even “found” other serious problems in addition to those which had been criticized. For example, they said, “With regard to Einstein’s idealism, we had a wrong understanding before”. This refers to an article criticizing Einstein published in *Science Bulletin* named “The Great Physicist Is But a Small Philosopher” by Karbov, in which, when disclosing Einstein’s idealism by taking the example of the interchangeability of material and energy, “a footnote was foolishly added”, which read

“... that ‘material and energy are interchangeable’ is based on experimentation, and it is not an argument of idealism. The translation is correct, while it is ill-considered in the original text.”

So “it clearly shows that we were muddle-headed idealists taking sides with Einstein”.<sup>7</sup> In fact, China at that time was influenced by Soviet Union’s criticism of various “capitalist theories of science”, including Theory of Relativity. Meanwhile, *Lu Dingyi*, Head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), wrote a letter to Guo Moruo, President of CAS, in which Lu pointed out the serious political mistakes existing in the publications of the Academy, and ordered that they must be corrected immediately. Under such pressure, CAS President and Vice President felt uneasy and then transferred Xu Liangying from Hangzhou to supervise the journal, who majored in physics and was a CPC Underground Party member.

2 Hu Danian, *China and Albert Einstein: The Reception of the Physicist and His Theory in China 1917–1979*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2005.

3 Qu Jingcheng & Xu Liangying, “Preliminary Research on the Movement of Criticizing Einstein’s Relativities Theories during the Cultural Revolution in China”, in: Xu Liangying & Fang Lizhi (eds.), *Study on Einstein* (Series I), Science Press, Beijing 1989, pp. 212–251.

4 Xu Liangying – Zhao Zhongli – Xuansan Zhang (trans. and eds.), *Collection of Albert Einstein* (Vol. 3), Commercial Press, Beijing 1979, pp. 20–21.

5 Interview of Xu Liangying by Liu Bing, on the afternoon of July 18th, 2005, at Mr. Xu’s home, i.e. Room 704, Building 812, Zhongguancun.

6 Gong, Yuzhi, “Rectification of the Tendency of Deviating from Politics and Reality in Science Journals – criticism of *Science Bulletin*, Vol. 2”, *People’s Daily*, Jan. 10th, 1952.

7 Self-Reflection of Editors of *Science Bulletin*, *People’s Daily*, Jan. 25th, 1952.

In spite of the influence from Soviet Union's ideological criticism of science, in 1950s there were some positive comments on Einstein in *People's Daily*. For instance, in 1955, to mourn Einstein's death, the famous Chinese Physicist, *Zhou Peiyuan*, wrote an article named "Mourning for the Greatest Physicist Albert Einstein", in which he sang high praise for Einstein's scientific, social and political activities, and regarded him as "the greatest physicist in modern time", and said,

"(H)is fighting spirit of conquering the Nature and opposing persecution will long live in our mind. All the scientists should learn from Albert Einstein and devote themselves to apply science to peace and make good for humankind; we oppose American war traders putting science into the use of killing mankind!"<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, we can still sense from these quotations a heavy note of ideological influence of that time.

### **How did the Translation and Editing of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* start?**

When talking about the origin of translating and editing Einstein's works, we shall never forget the first and foremost person – Mr. Xu Liangying. As to his life, one may refer to his preface in his own collected papers,<sup>9</sup> and here is a very brief introduction to him. He was born in Linhai, Zhejiang province in 1920. As early as in the second grade in the secondary school, he dreamed to become a scientist as great as Einstein in the future. In high school period, he majored in electrical engineering in Hangzhou Senior Industrial Vocational High School held by Zhejiang University. In 1939, bearing the dream of "becoming an authority of modern physics", he entered Zhejiang University and studied in the Dept. of Physics. In 1941, Xu took part in "underground" activities for CPC (Communist Party of China). After graduation in 1942, his academic advisor Wang Ganchang invited him to be his assistant, but Xu turned it down, because he had made up his mind to become a career revolutionist. In 1945, Mr. Xu came back to Zhejiang University working as an assistant lecturer in the Dept. of Physics. He became a member of CPC in 1946, and in 1947, he worded as CPC Underground Party Secretary of Zhejiang University Branch. After the liberation of China in 1949, he was transferred to Hangzhou Youth Committee Office of CPC. In 1952, he was transferred to the Translation Bureau of Chinese Academy of Sciences, in charge of political censoring of tens of academic newspapers, journals and all the research monographs published by CAS, and in charge of editing the *Science Bulletin* by CAS as well. In 1956, he entered then-new-established Philosophy Institute to do some research in the field of History of Scientific Ideas and Philosophy of Science. In 1957, he openly opposed the "Anti-Right Movement", thus he was labeled as the "Right Extremist", and consequently he lost his job and CPC membership. He then was sent back to his hometown in 1958 and since then he had worked in the countryside as a farmer for about 20 years. He did not go back to CAS to work in the then-new-established Institute for the History of Natural Science until 1978.

According to Mr. Xu's himself, the label of the "Right Extremist" was removed from him in 1961. At that time the CAS party branch realized that the punishment was too harsh for him, but so many people of CAS were being sent to the rural places at the same time, so the party branch couldn't move him back to CAS. At the end of 1962, his former working unit, the Natural Dialectics Group (Group leader, Yu Guangyuan) of the Institute of Philoso-

phy sent him “A Draft Proposal for Selecting Some Important Works on the Natural Science and Philosophy to Translate”, in order to consult him about these selected works, and entrusted him with translating and editing *Selected Philosophical Works of Albert Einstein*. In order to help him out in living, the Institute of Philosophy introduced his former translated works *Foundation of Physics* to the Commercial Press. The Press planned to publish Mr. Xu’s *Foundation of Physics* and paid him remuneration beforehand, which helped him for living cost in the rural place. From then on, Mr. Xu, as a farmer, started his translation and editing of Einstein’s Papers.

As to one important background of why to translate Einstein’s Papers, Mr. Xu once recollected,

“At that time, everything in China was serving the political aims. The historical background was that the whole nation was competing with Soviet Union – Mao Zedong was to take the place of Khrushchev to be the revolutionary leader of the world; China was to become the world center of revolutionary theories; ... China was to criticize all the capitalist scholars including scientists around the world who were against Marxism, so their political and philosophical works should be translated for us to criticize.”

Therefore, the purpose of such translation was mainly related to politics and philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

### **Translating and Editing Process of the *Collected Papers of Albert Einstein* and the Fate of One Book and some Papers by Mr. Xu**

In order to translate Einstein’s Works, Xu moved from the rural place to Beijing in January 1963, and had lived there for four months. At the beginning he lived in the dorm of the Commercial Press, but several days later he was evicted for being a Righty even though his label of “the Righty” had been removed. Later, he had lived in the Institute of Philosophy for two months, and then was evicted for the same reason. As last he had to live in his friend Zhao Zhongli’s home, who later became another translator of the *Collection of Albert Einstein*. In this period, the Commercial Press formally signed a contract with Xu for requested articles. At the same time, Xu got to know that Li Baoheng who worked for Shanghai Science Committee also wanted to translate Einstein’s Works. Considering himself was just a farmer while Li Baoheng was a Party member, whose membership would bring much convenience to the translating and editing work, so Xu invited Li to join him.<sup>11</sup>

During these four months in Beijing, Xu Liangying borrowed from Beijing Library and the like many books related to Einstein, including many kinds of biographies written by famous authors. In May, he borrowed a large pile of books and brought them back to the rural place, and began to translate in extremely poor conditions. He worked over 14 hours per day. At that time as the power was cut at eight or nine o’clock in rural places, Xu had to work in the kerosene light until one or two o’clock in the morning. After one and

8  
Zhou, Peiyuan, “Mourning for the Greatest Modern Physicist Albert Einstein”, *People’s Daily*, April 21st, 1955.

9  
Xu, Liangying, *Science, Democracy, Rationality – Collection of Xu Liangying (1977–1999)*, Mirror Books, Hongkong 2001, pp. 5–14.

10  
Interview of Xu Liangying by Liu Bing, on the afternoon of July, 18th, 2005, at Mr. Xu’s home, i.e. Room 704, Building 812, Zhongguancun.

11  
Ibid.

a half years till Oct. 1964, he finished over 500,000-word translated papers, and went to Shanghai to consult with Li Baoheng about it. Unfortunately, the Commercial Press couldn't take into account *Einstein's Papers* because it was involved in the "Four Clean-Ups" Movement.

Just during that putting-off-publication period, Xu Liangying wrote more than 90,000-word postscript. After reading, Li Baoheng thought it pretty good, and suggested a book should be written on its basis. So by Oct. 1965 Xu had finished a monograph *Einstein's World View* of about 170,000 words. Since the Class Struggle was very intense at that time, it was pretty hard to publish such works. In order to find out the outside reaction to such works, Xu wrote a treatise of 25,000 words named *On Einstein's Philosophical Thought*, which was in fact a contracted paper of the philosophical thoughts in the Postscript and *Einstein's World View*. After Li Baoheng polished it by adding some current social formulas, this paper was sent to *Journal of Studies in Dialectics of Nature*, and it was published on the fourth Number of 1965.<sup>12</sup> An episode was that: although this paper was written by Xu, he was not allowed to use his real name, because he was found out being a Righty by Editor Zha Ruqiang, who suggested that the Righty shouldn't be entitled to use his real name in publication. Thus Xu had to publish this treatise under the name "Lin Yin" and degraded as the second author.

### **The Movement of Criticizing Einstein and His Theory of Relativity and the Fate of the Translated Papers**

During the "Cultural Revolution" started from 1968, the criticism movement held by "Natural Scientific Theories Front Line" started up. Accordingly, Einstein and his scientific theories represented by Theory of Relativity had gone through a severe criticism in China, which already had precedents in history, such as that in Germany and Soviet Union respectively. There were mainly two "battle fields" – one in Beijing, the other in Shanghai – and the criticism was much more intense and lasted much longer in the latter battle field. As to the details of this movement, you may refer to Xu and his graduate student Qu Jingcheng's historical research,<sup>13</sup> so now and here I am just going to review some incidents related to Xu and his translated *Collection of Albert Einstein*.

In Oct. 1971, Xu found out from newspaper that the Commercial Press had resumed operation, which once changed its name to the "Red East Press". So Xu wrote to the Press inquiring whether they could publish the already finished translated papers. In reply, he was required to send his translated papers to the Press immediately. But at that time, both the translated papers and the manuscript of *Einstein's World View* were forcefully borrowed from Li Baoheng by Shanghai "Writers' Group", whose aim was to criticize Einstein. Xu requested his papers from the Group, but got no reply. Under that condition, Xu wrote a letter to the people in charge of it, in which he said if they didn't return his translated papers, he would "resort to the Laws". At last, he got back his translated papers, however, the manuscript of *Einstein's World View* was "unfound".

In March, 1972, Xu took the translated papers to Beijing and transferred it to the Commercial Press, which also wanted to publish it as soon as possible. But then, nine years after the ready translated papers, there were some new materials abroad, so Xu Liangying and Li Baoheng continued to translate some new materials and re-proof the manuscript which had been altered by Shanghai "Writers' Group". Just in this process, Xu got to know that Shanghai

People Press was going to publish a book named *Einstein's Collection*, whose introduction showed that the content was exactly the same with Xu's translated papers. Therefore, Xu wrote some articles to disclose its tricks and sent these articles to related people around the country, and went to Shanghai to negotiate. In the negotiation, the man answering for it in Shanghai "directed" that their *Einstein's Collection* was based on Xu's translated papers, so Xu's name could be added to it and he could be paid the remuneration immediately, and they even promised to give him a paid job, but the publication problems of the Commercial Press should leave to Shanghai People Press to solve. To the last point, Xu straightly disagreed. He insisted that the book should be published by the Commercial Press as originally scheduled and that Shanghai People Press could only publish a contracted one which must be proofed by Xu himself before publication. Encountered with such straightforward opposition, Shanghai side just directly informed Li and Xu that the People Press's publication of the book had nothing to do with Xu. Under this condition, Xu sent a letter though someone appealing to Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, but it was returned. So he forwarded it to Zhu Kezhen who was then the CAS Vice Chairman. Then the letter was forwarded to the State Council by CAS. At last, Shanghai side had to send voluntarily representatives to reach an agreement with the Commercial Press: Shanghai People Press made an in-house publication, while the Commercial Press published it openly according to the original plan.

In Sept. 1973, Shanghai published *Selected Works of Albert Einstein*, on the head page of which mentioned that this book was "translated and edited collectively" by more than ten people of Fudan University, what's more, "in their translating and editing process, they had referred to Xu Liangying and Li Baoheng's old translated manuscript of 1962 to 1965". A note taken by Xu on, Nov., the 5<sup>th</sup>, 1973 on the head page of this book in his rural hometown reads like this:

"There are 197 articles in the book of altogether 533 000 words. They themselves translated 30 articles of 33 000 words, making up 6% of the total! Ninety-four percent was piratical!... Altogether 12 persons just translated 30 articles, while plagiarizing the other 166 articles. They had merely done some proof reading work (even with many wrong proof readings). All these are the 'collective work' of the twelve people, while other's translated papers are nothing but 'for reference'? On the one hand, they tried to publish this plagiarized book preemptively, on the other hand, they called the other's former translated papers 'old manuscript'. They are really not aboveboard."

Since Shanghai had tried to publish it preemptively, Xu and some other people thought that it was necessary to expand the content of the book from originally planned one volume to three volumes, and the title should be changed to *Selected Papers of Albert Einstein*. This suggestion was adopted by the Commercial Press. As Li Baoheng was still in Shanghai at that time, Xu couldn't continue their cooperation. Therefore, Xu invited his two friends, Fan Dainian and Zhao Zhongli, to join him, both of whom were engaged in the studies of Dialectics of Nature. (They were once labeled as "the Right" for being entangled with Xu Liangying.) In Sept. 1974, the first volume (460 000 words) was finally handed in to the press. One week later it was sent to the printery

12

Li Baoheng & Lin Yin, "On Einstein's Philosophical Thoughts", *Journal of Studies on Dialectics of Nature* (4/1965), pp. 32–46.

13

Qu Jingcheng & Xu Liangying, "Preliminary Research on the Movement of Criticizing

Einstein's Relativities Theories during the Cultural Revolution in China", in: Xu Liangyin & Fang Lizhi (eds.), *Study on Einstein* (Series I), Science Press, Beijing 1989, pp. 212–251.

for typesetting. At the same time, the movement to criticize Einstein and his Theory of Relativity in Shanghai was just vigorous. So after going through a series of twists and turns, the second volume was handed in in Sept. of the next year.

After the Press received the second volume, the publication of the third volume was encountered with some problems because the Press worried that Einstein's social and political remarks in the third volume would arouse some trouble. Later, Yu Guangyuan solved the problem through Shi Ximin, general director of Publication Bureau. Xu also invited his former classmate Zhang Xuansan to join the translating work.

### **Publication of the *Collection of Albert Einstein***

In 1973 when it was planned to expand the original works into three volumes, some people presented their objection to its original title *Selected Papers of Albert Einstein*. They thought the phrase “selected papers” could be applied only to revolutionary leaders instead of “capitalist scientist”. So Yu Guangyuan suggested that it change to *Collection of Albert Einstein*. In Dec. 1976, the first volume was at last published. (At that time the “Publishing Date” on the copyright page was in fact the date of finishing press proof and sending it to publish, while it was not until Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1976 that the translators and editors had seen the published book.)<sup>14</sup> There was another interesting episode before publication. When designing the cover page, people in charge directed that red color was not allowed on the cover page, and bronzing couldn't be put to use on the characters of the title. The reason was very simple: sacred colors were not allowed to decorate capitalist stuff. Therefore, the cover pages of this collection were designed in green color.

About one year later, in March 1977, the second volume of *Collection of Albert Einstein* was published,<sup>15</sup> while the third volume wasn't published until Oct. 1979.<sup>16</sup> In May of the next year, *People's Daily* specially covered the notice that *Collection of Albert Einstein* was fully published. Although the Commercial Press had won in the competition with Shanghai that it could publish the book openly, in 1976 when the first volume was to publish, the new-on-stage “Left” leader insisted “in-house publication”. Despite that, 25,000 copies of the impression were short of storage in not more than half a year. A note taken down by Mr. Xu in an article of his own collected papers:

“In July 1977, the Commercial Press informed me that *Collection of Albert Einstein vol. I* was to be reprinted, and it was changed to open publication, and I was asked to write a Preface. It took me five days to work out a preface of 15,000 words in a hurry. Unfortunately, it was denied by a director of Editing Office who was specially in charge of political thoughts. He said that I was spreading capitalist thoughts. So we had to ask Mr. Zhou Peiyuan to write the Preface, who gladly agreed but still asked us to draft it. He said a 5,000-word preface condensed from the original one would be OK. In Nov., I sent the draft to Mr. Zhou, with which he showed his satisfaction. Then he himself amended it prudently and added one paragraph of his own feeling of his direct communication with Einstein from 1936 to 1937. In March 1978, *Collection of Albert Einstein vol. I* was republished. On March 14<sup>th</sup> (the 99<sup>th</sup> Birth anniversary of Einstein), *People's Daily* covered Mr. Zhou Peiyuan's Preface, and in that evening, Xinhua News Agency released the related news abroad as well.”<sup>17</sup>

In the original draft written by Xu Liangying, there was a remark referring to Einstein as “a huge bright star in human history of science and thoughts”. However, in proof reading, it was cancelled by the person in charge of the Editing Office. What lay behind it was that since Karl Marx there had been no Thinkers any more in the capitalist class. Xu strongly disagreed with it, and

then Zhou Yuanpei suggested that they just mention “human history” instead of “the history of science and thoughts”. Eventually, the evaluation of Einstein in the preface became “he was a huge bright star in human history”!<sup>18</sup>

## Impact

Until 1994, the first volume of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* had been reprinted four times, and the second and third volumes had been reprinted three times. This tome has a huge impact in society, because since the founding of PRC to the publication of the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, it has been the first time to introduce into our country Einstein’s science and doctrines in a comprehensive way, apart from a few translated papers of introducing the Theory of Relativity.

Actually, as to the impact of the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, there has no concrete and quantified study done by means of communication yet. But, we still can feel its impact from several instances.

Firstly, in the middle of 1980s, a survey about the favorite books of college students at that time was covered on the newspaper, and the *Collection of Albert Einstein* was in the list.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we could see that the *Collection of Albert Einstein* had some influence among the college students at that time, who were a representative social group.

Secondly, Mr. Xu Liangying once recalled another instance with more Chinese characteristics. That is, Zhong Peizhang, who once worked with Xu as the leader of the CPC Underground Party in Hangzhou, Deputy Chief Editor of *China Youth Daily* before the Anti-Right Movement, told Xu in 1977: during a rest of a cadres meeting of youth work, Hu Yaobang, already resuming his work in the Party, said that he brought a book named *Collection of Albert Einstein*, which was pretty good, and although he couldn’t understand some parts of it, he felt greatly enlightened by what he could understand. In 1978, Head of the Cadre Bureau of Economics in the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee, Ke Li, who was Xu Liangying’s leader of Underground Party, told Xu that, once in a cadres meeting of the Organization Department, Hu Yaobang said he hoped everyone read the *Collection of Albert Einstein*.<sup>20</sup> That a CPC leader could notice such scientists’ books as the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, and attached great importance to it, is really rare, which not only shows Hu Yaobang was open-minded and curious

14  
Xu Liangying & Fan Dainian (trans. & eds.), *Collection of Albert Einstein* (Vol. 1), Commercial Press, Beijing 1976.

15  
Fan Dainiang – Zhao Zhongli – Xu Liangying (trans. & eds.), *Collection of Albert Einstein* (Vol. 2), Commercial Press, Beijing 1977.

16  
Xu Liangying – Zhao Zhongli – Zhang, Xuan (trans. & Eds.), *Collection of Albert Einstein* (Vol. 3), Commercial Press, Beijing 1979.

17  
Xu Liangying, *Science, Democracy, Rationality – Collection of Xu Liangying (1977–1999)*, Mirror Books, Hongkong 2001, p. 15.

18  
Interview of Xu Liangying by Liu Bing, on the afternoon of July 18th, 2005, at Mr. Xu’s home, i.e. Room 704, Building 812, Zhongguancun.

19  
Albert Einstein, *Approaching Albert Einstein* (Xu Liangying & Wang Ruizhi, trans.), Liaoning Education Press, Beijing 2005, p. III.

20  
Interview of Xu Liangying by Liu Bing, on the afternoon of July 18th, 2005, at Mr. Xu’s home, i.e. Room 704, Building 812, Zhongguancun.

in learning, but also reflects the impact of this tome from a special perspective.

Thirdly, I have searched the word “Einstein” in all the articles published in *People’s Daily* from 1949 to 1980, and the results shows as follows:



**Figure 1.** Numbers of the papers published in Peoples Daily in different years.

From the statistics above, we could see that after the publication of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* in 1976, there was a sharp increase of the articles containing the word “Einstein” in *People’s Daily*. Surely, there might be other interpretations of this graph and other questions needing explanation behind it. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, when Einstein and his Theory of Relativity were under criticism, *People’s Daily* kept “silence” or evaded Einstein.

### **Commemoration of the 100th Birth Anniversary of Einstein**

The third volume of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* was issued in Oct. 1979, and up till then, the Collection of three volumes were completely published. Coincidentally, that year was the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Einstein, and a series of activities were held to commemorate him in the same year, among which, the grandest one was the commemoration held by China Association for Science and Technology, China Physics Society and China Astronomy Society on the February 20<sup>th</sup>, with more than one thousand participants. According to Xu Liangying’s recall, it was him who suggested Qian Sanqiang in 1977 commemorating Einstein’s 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary in a grand way in order to sweep the negative influence caused by the criticism of Einstein during the Cultural Revolution and restore his original image. In 1978, CAS Party

organization reported to CPC Central Committee, and got approval from the Chairman Hua Guofeng, Vice Chairmen Deng Xiaoping and Li Xiannian. Xinhua News Agency ran a piece of news about this meeting, in which it wrote:

“The Commemoration was held in the Auditorium of Chinese People’s Political Consultation. Above the platform hung the banner of ‘Commemoration of the Great Scientist Einstein’s 100<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary’ and his portrait. Vice Premier of the State Council of PRC and Director of State Commission of Science and Technology Fang Yi, people in charge of Political Consultation and State Commission of Science and Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, State Educational Department, China Association for Science & Technology, Beijing Commission of Science and Technology, China Physics Society, and China Astronomy Society, such as Jiang Nanxiang, Yu Guangyuan, Li Chang, Zhou Peiyuan, Qian Sanqiang, Yan Jici, Mao Yisheng, Pei Lisheng, Bai Jiefu, Wang Ganchang, Shi Ruwei, Zhang Wenyu, Wang Zhuxi, Gan Bo, Wang Dezhao, Zhang Yuzhe, Wang Shouwan, Sa Kongliao participated in the Commemoration. ... The Commemoration was hosted by Qian Sanqiang, Vice President of Chinese Academy of Science and Deputy Director of China Physics Society. Deputy Chairman of China Association for Science & Technology, Vice President of Chinese Academy of Science Zhou Peiyuan, Deputy Director of State Commission of Science and Technology, Vice President of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Yu Guangyuan delivered speeches respectively on the Commemoration.”<sup>21</sup>

On the next day, *People’s Daily* and *Guang Ming Daily* covered Zhou Peiyuan and Yu Guangyuan’s extracted speeches with a whole page respectively. Zhou Peiyuan claimed in his report, “Today we grandly commemorate him in order to restore his glorious image as a great scientist”. His report not only summarized and praised Einstein’s contributions to science, but also quite affirmed his philosophical, social and political standpoints. At the end of the report, Zhou Peiyuan especially pointed out:

“Today we grandly commemorate him in order to succeed and develop the career that Einstein fought for all his life; to learn from his lofty virtue of never fearing either hardship, mighty power or violence, of his devotion to truth and sacrifice for justice; to learn from his scientific spirit of obeying the truth, being practical and realistic, bold to think and innovate independently without having blind faith in authority or following blindly old traditions; to learn from his exploring spirit of never confining himself and never being self-conceit on the way to science, and his always pressing forward with indomitable will; to learn from his lofty rationality, his care and respect for others, his democratic spirit of opposing idolatry and autarchy; to learn from his consistency in practice and preach; to learn from his lifelong consistency in pursuing truth and welfare for mankind.”<sup>22</sup>

According to Xu Liangying’s recollection, Zhou Peiyuan’s report was drafted by Xu with more than ten thousand words, and then it was revised by Zhou himself. While revising the draft, Zhou also consulted with Xu.<sup>23</sup>

From then on, in a broad sense, spreading, not to mention studying, of Einstein’s doctrines has not been controvertible or problematic any longer.

21  
“A Grand Assembly with Over 1000 Scientists in the Capital City”, *People’s Daily*, Feb. 21st, 1979.

22  
Zhou Peiyuan, “The World Venerated Greatest Scientist – Report in the Commemoration of Albert Einstein’s 100<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary (Abstract)”, *People’s Daily*, Feb. 21st, 1979.

23  
Interview of Xu Liangying by Liu Bing, on the afternoon of July 18th, 2005, at Mr. Xu’s home, i.e. Room 704, Building 812, Zhongguancun.

### Brief and Elementary Analysis and Comments

With regard to the historical review of the background and process of the publication the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, and so many instances related to the comments on Einstein, we could draw from it some brief and elementary analysis and comments.

What is worth our attention is that we could see the ideological symbols attached to Einstein in all the phases after the founding of PRC, no matter from the restraint of the comment on Einstein's philosophy at the very beginning, to the start of editing and publishing the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, to the difficulties and frustrations caused by the negative comments on or even harsh criticism of Einstein in the editing and publishing process, or to the official affirmation of Einstein at last. However, in different phases these ideological symbols were different and emerged in different ways.

The movement of criticizing Einstein and his Theory of Relativity in the special period of Cultural Revolution is a case worth particular study. In addition, in other phases which involve the spreading, studies and evaluations of Einstein's doctrines, we can also feel the influence of Soviet Union's political criticism of science and scientists, and the influence of distinct extreme-leftist way of thinking due to holding on to Marxism dogmatically. Even in the series of activities commemorating Einstein's 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary in 1979, in the field of Natural Dialectics closely connected with the study of Einstein's science and philosophy, in the symposium held by the *Journal of Dialectics of Nature* on discussing Einstein's achievements in science and philosophy, Einstein was affirmed in a comprehensive way, and on the other hand, some viewpoints were still reserved:

“(S)ome participants hold that the main problem existing in Einstein's philosophy is lack of self-conscious dialectic thoughts. Few dialectics was mentioned in his works. Although there are many dialectic viewpoints in his Theory of Relativity, he was not aware of the value of dialectics subjectively. Due to this reason, he didn't accept quantum mechanics for a long time, although he was regarded as its founder, which is a lesson worth our attention.”<sup>24</sup>

Of course, as time flies, people's viewpoints are changing ceaselessly, and become more open and more rational.

Besides those critics, people like the main editor of the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, Xu Liangying himself, also experienced such process of changes. For example, in the above mentioned *On Einstein's Philosophical Thought* published with his pen name with the co-author of Li Baoheng, which was based on *Einstein's World View* after the Xu's first translation draft of the *Collection of Albert Einstein*, people nowadays will find much improper evaluation and criticism of Einstein through re-reading this influential paper of that time. Mr. Xu Liangying himself also admitted in our talk that the article published in the *Journal of Dialectics of Nature* at that time was quite “left”, and his attitudes towards Einstein did not fundamentally change till later.

The publication of the three-volume *Collection of Albert Einstein* at last made an enormous impact. In this tome, we can feel the traces of some eras. In 1988, *Science and Technology Daily* ran a book review, in which after adequately affirmed the value and significance of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* with strong recommendation, the writer Fang Lizhi pointed out some problems existing in the notes made by the editors. For instance, in the footnote to Einstein's “Opinions on Engels' Natural Dialectics”, the editor said “the real funny thing? is just Einstein's ignorance and his stubborn capitalist prejudice”, etc. The writer of this book review regarded it as “an anti-science

pollution of the time”. To this criticism, Xu Liangying wrote an article named “Why do Such Mistakes Exist in the *Collection of Albert Einstein*” to explain that this mistake in footnote had been corrected in 1978, and the re-published version in 1983 has already corrected it. At the same time, Xu Liangying frankly accepted the book review’s sharp criticism and reflected on it deeply. Xu Liangying said,

“What is sad is that this pollution is not due to my fear of undertaking the risk of time caused by outside pressure, but is from my blind loyalty and faith inside my mind.... This experience makes me realize that blind faith is the greatest enemy of truth. Various modern superstitions and blind faith supported by blind loyalty must be broken down by science and democracy, which is a long and tortuous process.”<sup>25</sup>

From 1974 to 1987, Mr. Xu Liangying had walked on this long and tortuous road for altogether 13 years.

The main editor of the *Collection of Albert Einstein* Mr. Xu Liangying’s inward pilgrimage might be in a sense an embodiment of the developing time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I sincerely thank **Mr. Xu Liangying**, especially for his provision of important references, including unpublished recollected articles and information, for his acceptance of my interview and his precious suggestions to improve this article.)

Liu Bing

### Einige historische Analysen der Übersetzung und Veröffentlichung von Einsteins gesammelten Werken in China

#### Zusammenfassung

Wie in anderen Ländern, so galt Einstein auch in China als einer der berühmtesten Wissenschaftler schlechthin. In den siebziger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts wurden drei Bände Einstein’scher Schriften zusammengestellt, übersetzt und als Einsteins gesammelte Werke veröffentlicht. Diese Bände dienten lange Zeit vielen Chinesen als Hauptwissensquelle über Einstein; sie übten sogar einen bedeutenden ideologischen Einfluss aus. Im Hintergrund dieses herausgeberischen Projekts standen in der Zeit nach 1949 einflussreiche politische Bewegungen im Zusammenwirken mit wissenschaftskritischen Ansätzen, die ein solches Projekt erst möglich machten und die Textauswahl sowie die Herangehensweise bei der Übersetzung und den Druckvorbereitungen beeinflussten. Unter den Herausgebern und Übersetzern kommt Xu Liangying eine besondere und wichtige Rolle zu, denn er war ursprünglich, vor der Gründung der Republik China, ein Untergrundrevolutionär gewesen. Später wurde er Wissenschaftshistoriker. Es vergingen fast 10 Jahre, bis er die Übersetzung der Einstein’schen Schriften fertigstellen konnte, da er gleichzeitig als Bauer auf dem Lande arbeiten musste und während der „Anti-Rechts-Bewegung“ „rechts“ stand. Die Übersetzung und Veröffentlichung von Einsteins gesammelten Werken in diesem besonderen soziologischen, kulturellen und politischen Kontext bietet viel Stoff für Rückblicke und Aufarbeitungen aus historischer Perspektive. Vor allem die ideologischen, symbolischen Implikationen in Zusammenhang mit Einstein waren ein dominantes Merkmal jener Zeit.

#### Schlüsselwörter

Übersetzung, Druckvorbereitung, Veröffentlichung, Albert Einstein, China

24

Li Xiugou, “His Achievements Belong to Mankind – Note on the Symposium on Commemorating Albert Einstein’s 100<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary”, *Journal of Dialectics of Nature* (2/1979), pp. 17–19.

25

Xu Liangying, *Science, Democracy, Rationality – Collection of Xu Liangying (1977–1999)*, Mirror Books, Hongkong 2001, pp. 183–188.

Liu Bing

**Quelques analyses historiques des traductions et des  
publications des Œuvres complètes d'Einstein**

**Sommaire**

*Comme dans les autres pays, Einstein a été l'un des scientifiques les plus célèbres en Chine. Dans les années soixante-dix du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle, trois volumes des Œuvres complètes d'Einstein ont été traduits et publiés en Chine. Pour de nombreux Chinois ces volumes représentaient une source d'informations sur Einstein et une influence idéologique importante. Le contexte politique en est le suivant: après l'an 1949 des mouvements politiques très influents sont nés en Chine, ayant pour objectif la critique des sciences. Ces mouvements ont beaucoup influencé les décisions, la sélection, le progrès ainsi que la manière de traduire et de publier les œuvres d'Einstein. Parmi les éditeurs et les traducteurs excellait Xu Liangying. Révolutionnaire clandestin avant la mise en place de la République, il est devenu par la suite historien de la science. Il a investi presque dix ans pour terminer la traduction des œuvres d'Einstein parce qu'à l'époque il travaillait comme agriculteur pour ses idées de droite pendant la Révolution culturelle. Dans ce contexte sociologique, culturel et politique, la traduction et la publication des Œuvres complètes d'Einstein offre beaucoup de points qui méritent d'être examinés et analysés dans une perspective historique. Surtout, par exemple, les implications idéologiques, symboliques reliés à Einstein et qui ont été les caractéristiques dominantes de cette époque historique.*

**Mots clés**

Traduction, édition, publication, Albert Einstein, Chine