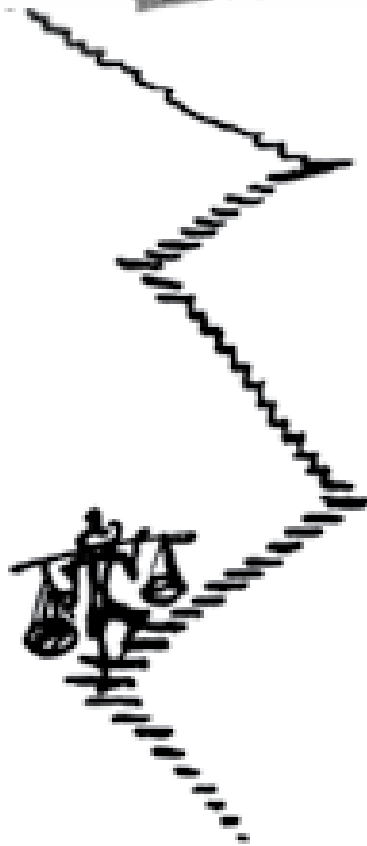


# SAPAJOU



The Collected Works of Old Shanghai's Greatest Cartoonist

## The Early Years

Edited by Nenad Djordjevic

EARNSHAW  
BOOKS

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# Foreword

**S**apajou was the greatest cartoonist of old China. He was the face of Shanghai's White Russian community and the star of the editorial team of the *North-China Daily News*, East Asia's premier newspaper. In fact, his body of work is so rich that we have divided it into three volumes.

This first volume of the collection covers one of the most remarkable periods of old Shanghai's history: 1923-1931. Largely spared the effects of the Qing Dynasty's collapse in 1911 and the First World War 1914-18, Shanghai had emerged in the 1920s as the trading center of East Asia and one of the largest cities in the world. With a population of more than two million, Shanghai embraced many cultures and many came there searching their fortunes. In the 1920s alone, eleven major office buildings were constructed on the Bund, a sure sign of prosperity.

Nothing seemed able to threaten Shanghai's dynamism. The city benefited not only from the peace in Europe, which brought renewed confidence in business, but also from the civil war in China, as Shanghai was a neutral city, offering refuge and a place for investment for all sides in all conflicts. In this period, Shanghai firmly established its reputation as the Pearl of the Orient, the Capitalist Mecca of the Far East, Wicked City of the East, Babylon of the East, Paris of the Orient, Jazz Capital of Asia and the City of Refugees. Shanghai was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world and home to a great many different nationalities. Among them, the British were the first to arrive, first to gain extraterritorial



*Sapajou in 1926*

rights, first to establish a foreign settlement, first to open a consulate, first to establish trade offices, and the first to establish social clubs and associations. As Britons were the most influential in the International Settlement, the French residents in Shanghai concentrated their efforts mostly within the borders of the French Concession, where they had their own police, administration and social establishments. In the early 20th century, the declaration of an “open door policy” resulted in a sharp increase in the American population and American influence in Shanghai and the creation of many American institutions. With the German defeat in 1918, German activities and influence in Shanghai were muted by the 1920s.

Large-scale Japanese arrivals to Shanghai began after Japan’s defeat of China in the war of 1895, when they gained extraterritorial rights. By 1915 the Japanese were the largest foreign community in Shanghai, with the English a distant second. By 1931, almost half of the foreign population of the International Settlement was Japanese. Many of them hoped to stay in Shanghai permanently, so they created their own social milieu in “Little Tokyo” (Hongkew – today spelt Hongkou), where they had their consulate, Chamber of Commerce, shops, apartments, cotton mills, banks and social clubs.



# Sapajou's Life

**G**eorgi Avksentievich Sapojnikoff – Sapajou – was a very popular character in the Shanghai of the 1920s and 1930s. Everybody seemed to know the man whose drawings were, for almost two decades, featured prominently on the front page of the *North-China Daily News*, at the time the most influential newspaper, not only in Shanghai, but in the whole of East Asia.

Sapajou was often present where there was any kind of action. Thus, one day he could be seen at the Municipal Council, the following day at the Shanghai Club and the next at the battlefield, sketching the warlord army soldiers in action. His employers held him in high regard. When he went on leave in June 1935, it was decided not to replace him with any other artist, and for a few weeks the newspaper went to print without any cartoons at all. This was then repeated each time Sapajou went on holiday. It was simply unthinkable by that time for the *North-China Daily News* to publish someone else's cartoons.



*Sapajou in the mid-1930s*

Sapajou was brilliant at capturing the essence of a Chinese scene, or of a political situation and he was also extremely productive, drawing at least two cartoons a day for the *North-China Daily News* from early 1923 to late 1941, except when he went on long holidays. He also drew at least one cartoon a week for the *North China Herald* (the weekly edition of the *North-China Daily News*), meaning that he produced, at the very least, a total of some 15,000 cartoons for the two newspapers. As he was also engaged in drawing for other newspapers, advertising agencies

and books, the total number of his cartoons and other drawings in these years would almost certainly exceed 20,000.

The end of old Shanghai, unfortunately but not unfittingly, coincided with the end of Sapajou's life. He died several days after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. His death occurred in obscurity, in a refugee transit camp in the Philippines and the *North-China Daily News* did not print any notice of his passing. As popular as he had been, he was now forgotten.

Very little is known about Sapajou's early years, but we do know that Georgii (or "Googa", as he was called by his friends and family) was born in 1893 in the Russian Turkmenistani railway hub of Chardjui (now Türkmenabat). His father was stationed there as part of a military campaign and his mother was Turkmenistan. It is unclear whether they ever married.

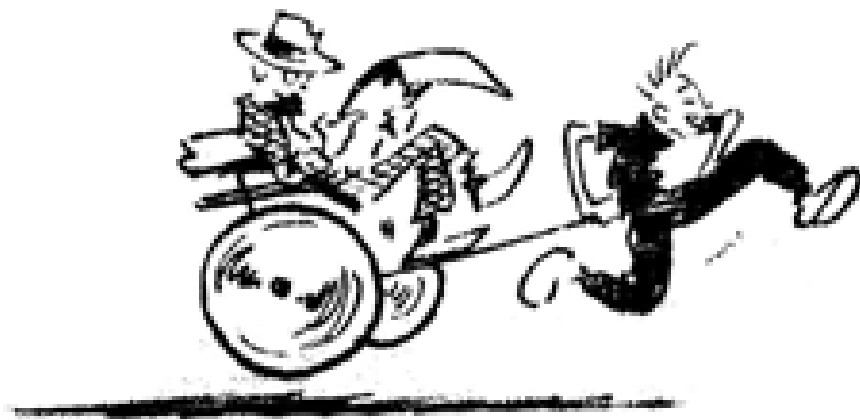
Like many White Russians of high standing, he led a relatively privileged life prior to World War I. He was educated in music, languages and, like his father, was taught painting by the Russian master Repin. He graduated from the Aleksandrovskoe Military School in Moscow and studied architecture at the University of St. Petersburg until the onset of World War I. His education is reflected in his art, though his knowledge of history, ancient mythology, politics and sociology was remarkable. He was a true student of the Russian Silver Age, a term applied to the creative period of Russian culture in the first two decades of the 20th century. The Russian Silver Age connected natural and artistic, Pagan and Christian, the mystic and the mundane – and all of that was visible in Sapajou's art.

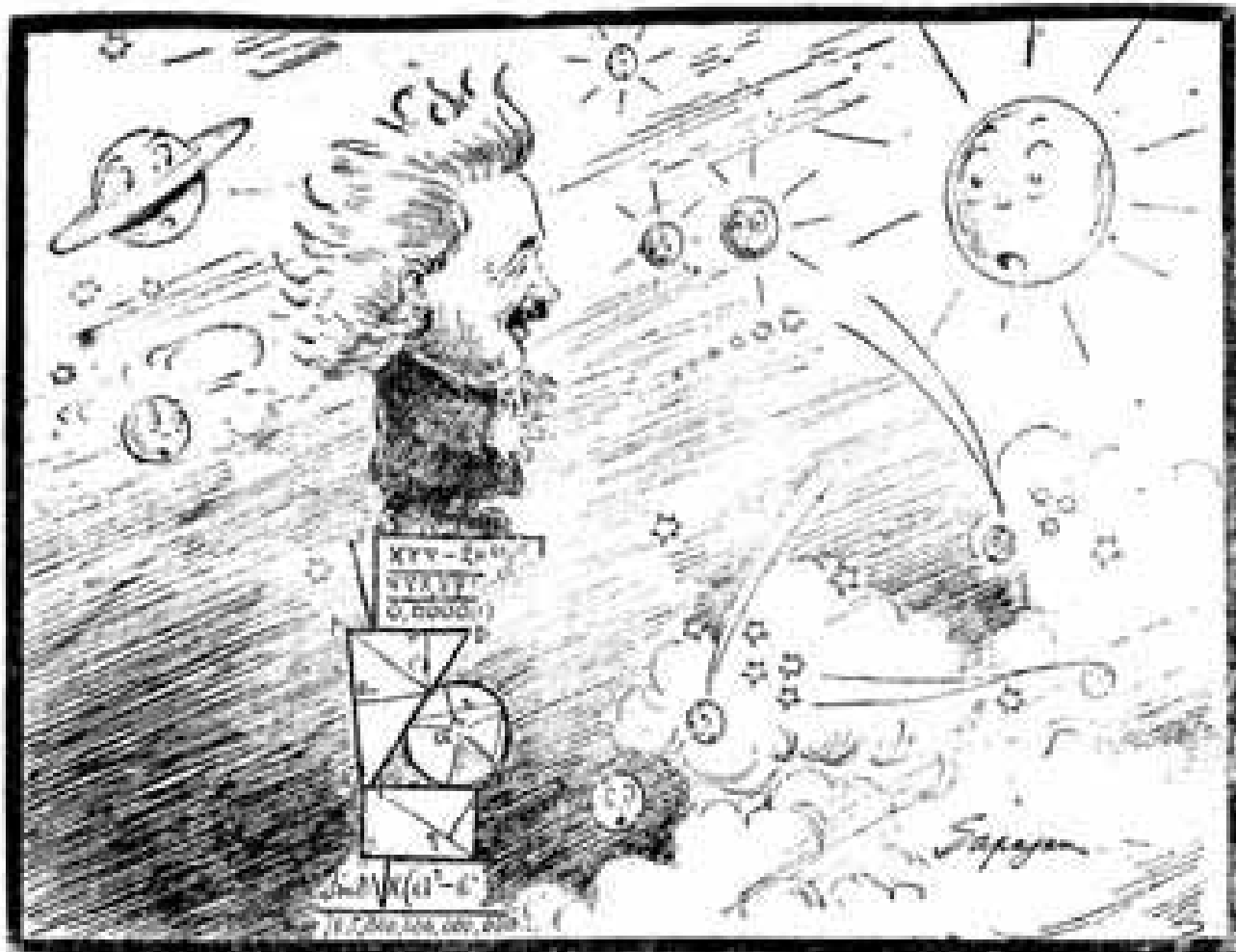
At 21, he entered the Russian Imperial Army as a lieutenant and was wounded on the battlefield. His captors were forced to amputate the toes on his left foot in order to save the leg, which



# 1923

*Sapajou*





### A LECTURE ON RELATIVITY

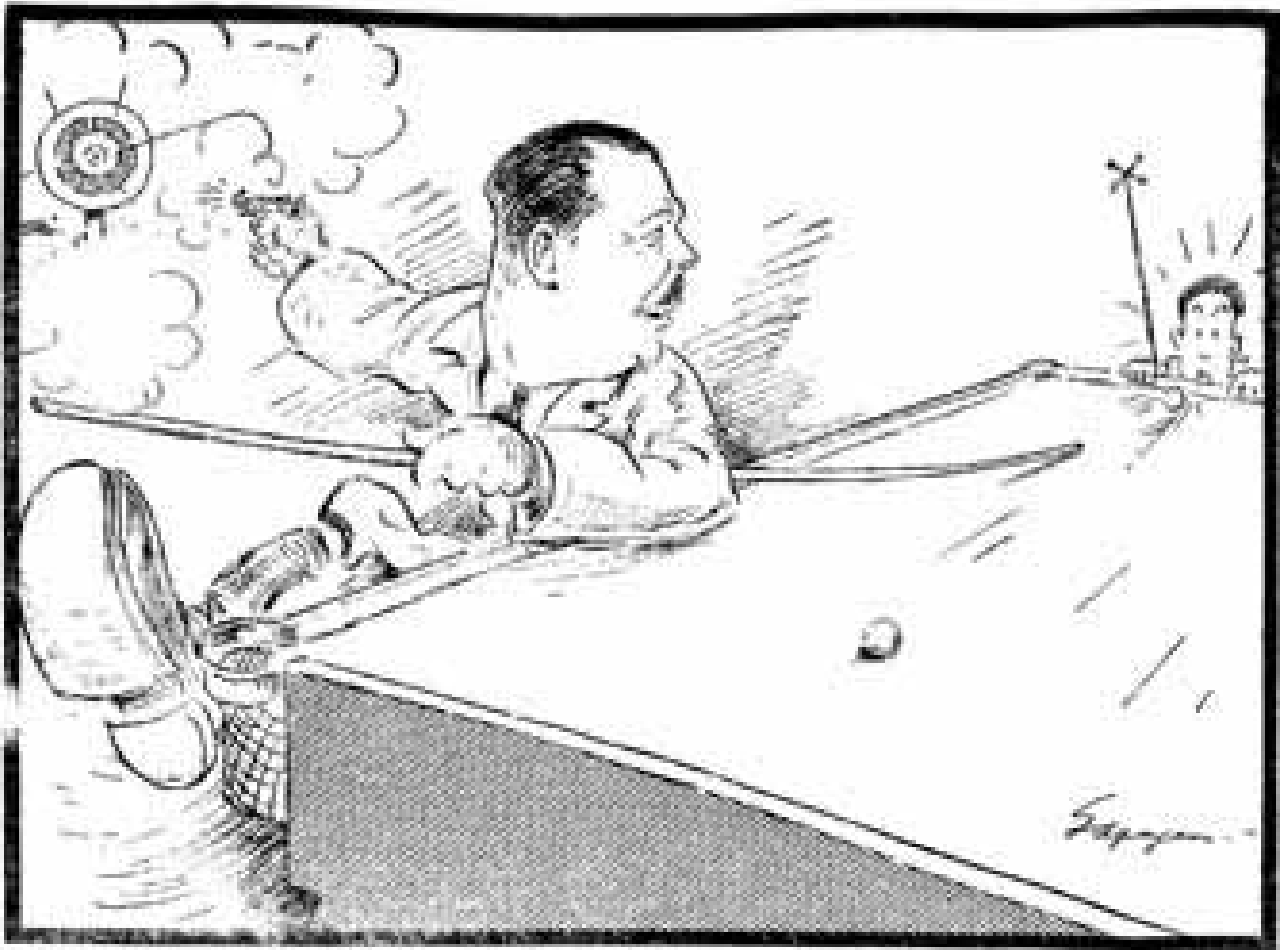
*From Sapiro's Sketchbook of a Caricaturist*

January 3, 1923

North-China Daily News

Albert Einstein visited Shanghai twice in the early 1920s. During his first visit, in Nov. 1922, he learned he had won the Nobel Prize in Physics. Albert and his wife Elsa were

warmly received by Shanghai's large Jewish community, though they declined an invitation to visit the German Consulate.



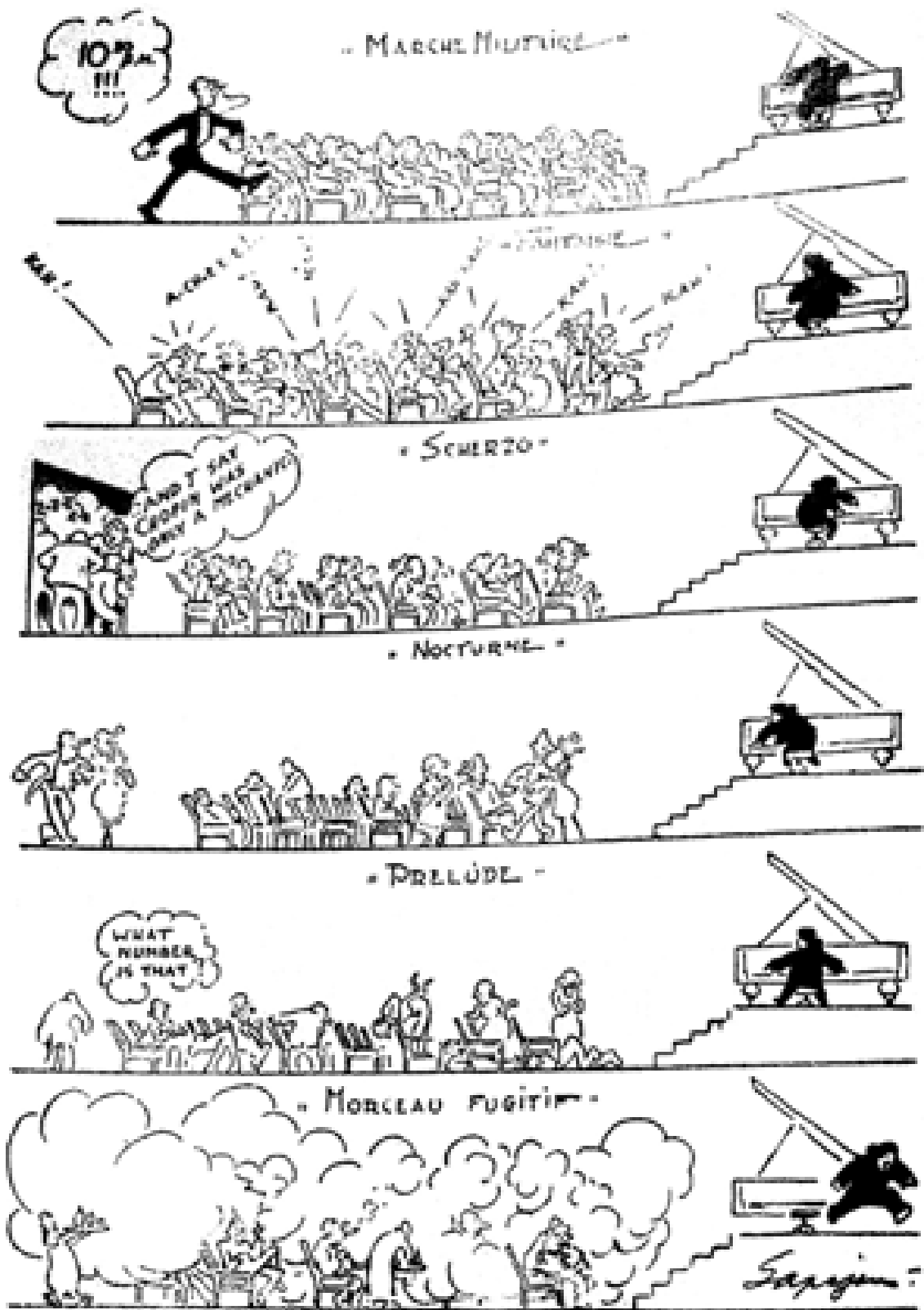
**BULLS AND BILLIARDS: CAPTAIN BARRETT GETS HIS EYE IN**

*Sapajou's Sketchbook of a Caricaturist*

January 4, 1923

North-China Daily News

Captain E.I.M. Barrett was a well known sportsman who served as commissioner of the Shanghai Municipal Police from 1925-1929.



OUR MUSIC LOVERS ENJOY THEMSELVES

January 19, 1923  
North-China Daily News