CHAPTER 2

Shao Xunmei and his Circle

Shao Xunmei and Pictorial Magazines

The close association that existed between Shao Xunmei, the cartoonist artists and the literary circles of Shanghai has been introduced in Chapter One. As publisher and editor, Shao was involved in the publication of many of the most important magazines during the 1930s. His life and work will be further examined in this chapter to demonstrate his standing as a major figure in the world of art and literature and to emphasize the close relationship he had with the artists who are the main focus of this book.

Shao did not write a full-scale autobiography.1 However, much information concerning his life and work can be found in a number of short autobiographical writings published in his own magazines. A full-length biography of Shao Xunmei by Lin Qi, Haishang caizi 海上才子 (A Talent from Shanghai), is largely based on these writings. In addition, a short but informative account of his life was written by his wife, Sheng Peiyu 盛佩玉 (1905–c.1988), in the 1980s.2 In the English language, a biography by Jonathan Hutt was published in 20013 and a more recent book by Gloria Bien, Baudelaire in China: A Study in Literary Reception gives a biography of Shao, presenting him as one of three Chinese decadent poets, together with Yu Gengyu 于赓虞 (1902–1963) and Yu Dafu.4

Much of the material for this chapter has been taken from Shao’s own writings, including his magazine articles and personal letters. The way in which Shao is discussed here is rather different to previous studies that focus on

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1 An unpublished partial family history written in English by Shao Xunmei My Triangle of Grandfathers can be found in the Hahn Mss. in the Lilly Library, Indiana University.
2 Sheng Peiyu 盛佩玉, “Wo he Shao Xunmei 我和邵洵美 [Shao Xunmei and Me],” in Huzhou shizhuan xuebao no. 2 (1985).
3 Jonathan Hutt, "The Sumptuous World of Shao Xunmei," in East Asian History no. 21 (June 2001): pp. 111–142. This article covers aspects of Shao’s life that are not addressed at any length here and can be referred to for further information concerning his life and work. There is also an unpublished doctoral thesis by Wang Jingfang 王京芳, Shao Xunmei he tade chuban shiye 邵洵美和他的出版事业 [Shao Xunmei and his Publishing Career] (doctoral thesis, Huadong Normal University, 2007).
him. Here, Shao's life and work is examined through a study of his friends, colleagues and associates. Such an approach will demonstrate Shao's central position in the history of the cartoon in 1930s Shanghai and will shed further light on the lives of those in his circle who were involved in the areas of art, design and literature, including the figures introduced in Chapter One, Zhang Guangyu, Zhang Zhenyu and Ye Qianyu. Above all, the purpose of this chapter is to contextualize. The areas covered—salon culture, fashion, design, the theatre—all contribute to the contextualization of the world of the cartoonists and their relationship to Shao Xunmei, a central figure within their own individual histories.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in public circles and particularly in English-language contexts, Shao Xunmei was most often known by the name Sinmay Zau. The magazines he published, in common with most other Chinese publications of the time, were also given both Western and Chinese names. His first publication, *Jinwu yuekan*, modelled after *The Yellow Book*, was known by the French name, *La Maison d’Or*. A list of publications with which he was closely involved continues with several groundbreaking magazines published, or printed, by his Modern Publications Ltd. and the *Di-yi chubanshe* (Number One Publishing Company). These are: *Shidai huabao* (現代畫報) (“Modern Miscellany”) (1929–37), *Shidai manhua* (時代漫畫) (“Modern Sketch”) (1934–37), *Shiritan* (十日談) (“The Decameron”) (1933–34), *Wanxiang* (萬象) (“Van Jan”), *Lunyu* (論語) (“The Analects”) (1932–37 and 1946–49); two magazines published in separate Chinese and English versions, *Shengse huabao* (聲色畫報) (“Vox”) and *Ziyoutan* (自由談) (“Candid Comment”); and several other associated publications, including *Shidai dianying* (時代電影) (Modern Film), *Wenxue shidai* (文學時代) (Literary Times) and *Renyan zhounakan* (人言周刊) (Renyan Weekly). In addition to his work as publisher, Shao’s name can be found on the editorial board of several other publications. Contributors to all these magazines, just a small selection of those with which Shao was involved, include many of the foremost figures in the cartoon world.

In 1934 an article by Shao Xunmei appeared in *Shidai huabao* entitled “Huabao zai wenhuajie de diwei” (畫報在文化界的地位) (The Status of Pictorials in the Cultural World) that goes someway towards explaining Shao’s

5. Gloria Bien suggests that Shao chose to spell his name in this way because of associations with decadence through a play on the word “sin.” It is perhaps more likely that this is an approximation of the pronunciation of his name in the local language of Shanghai. Gloria Bien, *Baudelaire in China*, p. 121.
6. For example *Wenyi huabao* (文藝畫報) [Art and Literature Pictorial].