

## Toward a History of Interwar Sino-Hungarian Cultural Relations: Three Advocates of Kuomintang Soft Power, Hungarian Irredentism and Pan-Danubianism

Mátyás Mervay

**Abstract:** This paper aims to achieve two goals: the first is to bring a fresh perspective to the Atlanto-centric history of Chinese propaganda while tracing the roots of Sino-Hungarian bilateral approaches and Hungarian Sinology to a time dating some fifteen years earlier than the mutual recognition of the two People's Republics. This analysis also introduces three actors of different political agendas who applied a similar PR tool of cultural diplomacy to elicit international sympathy for their homeland. After briefly surveying the primary stimuli of cultural diplomacy in interwar Hungary and Republican-Era China, I turn to pre-1949 Sino-Hungarian cultural approaches in the era of no formal diplomatic relations. Such initiatives offer valuable insights into the history of cultural diplomacy while also highlighting significant parallels with the present. Specifically, I introduce the political and cultural agenda of three individuals acting as cultural ambassadors to their homelands. The Shanghai Jewish refugee aid organizer, Paul Komor, and the women's association president, Theresia Moll, were members of the Hungarian diaspora in China. They introduced the post-Habsburg Central European region to a cosmopolitan community while exhibiting two different foci: Hungarian irredentism and pan-Danubianism. Meanwhile, Zhenya He, a Kuomintang propagandist and the University of Budapest's first Chinese language instructor during the 1930s, synthesized Hungarian pan-Asian Turanism with Sun Yat-sen's Tridemism to further Sino-Hungarian exchanges.

**Keywords:** *China-CEE relations; Concepts of Interwar Central and Eastern Europe; Chinese cultural diplomacy; Hungarian Irredentism; Interwar Propaganda*

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*"In speaking of Hungary today, it is quite impossible to avoid reference to the Treaty of Trianon...."* (Komor, *The Pagoda*, September 2, 1930: 2).

*"The Treaty of Trianon was the work of political sadists. It lacks fairness and justice...."* (Komor, MNL, 1938-1940?)

*"It is quite evident, that they, the Japanese have not learnt from the example that the post-[World] war [One], peaceful, based on justice, Europe has set them, that political aims are not to be enforced at the point of the gun and the scrap iron is, under no circumstances whatsoever, to be removed"* (Komor, September 2, 1938: 9).

These three quotes by Paul Komor, known after World War Two as the patron of Shanghai Jewish refugees, reveal a great deal about his sense of commitment to his fatherland while serving in the 1920s-1930s as the informal leader of the Shanghai Hungarian community. From a 1930 lecture addressing the Shanghai Rotary Club's Chinese and international audience, the first quotation highlights the importance of the trauma that the Treaty of Trianon inflicted upon Hungary. An excellent example of the numerous letters to the editor he wrote in defense of Hungarian official positions, the second quote clarifies Komor's take on the post-World War One peace process. The third piece is from an op-ed published in 1938 in the esteemed *North China Daily News*, exposing what Komor believed was the "West's" hypocritical criticism of the 1937 Japanese aggression in China. In an article oozing with scathing irony, Komor demanded that the Western public account for its unfulfilled Wilsonian liberal democratic ideals that had been meant to guarantee national self-determination after World War One. Komor deemed the Allies hypocrites who readily criticized Japan's imperialist invasion of China while not even considering revisions to the peace treaties that satisfied their own selfish geopolitical interests in Central and Eastern Europe.

In 1935, while Komor took up the cause of irredentist propaganda, a certain Zhenya He [何震亞] who had recently returned from Hungary authored a short Chinese book in Shanghai on Hun-Hungarian connections (He 1935). Had the contemporary Hungarian audience learned about He's publication, its claims of Hungarians being related to the ancient *Xiongnu* ['Huns'] would have hardly been a surprise. Having been exposed to century-old Asian origin-theories recently revived by the 1920s' Turanists who, in their disillusionment with the "West" turned to virtually every non-Indo-European or Semitic culture of Eurasia to find new friends based on largely imagined kinship connections, Hungarians would not have been surprised by He's ideas. While He's booklet was clearly intended for a wider readership, we unfortunately do not know enough about its contemporary reception in Shanghai.

Nevertheless, the significance of his piece lies elsewhere. Namely, it was the fruit of its author's almost decade-long stay in Europe, where he was known by the Europeanized moniker of "Prof. Asia Ho Dzin-ja."<sup>1</sup>

An adventurous young Chinese man, Zhenya He had already been living in Europe when, in the 1930s, he finally dove into the depths of Budapest's Turanist subculture. He taught at the University of Budapest and even contemplated undertaking a scholarly expedition to the *csángós*, an ethnic minority group living in Romania that speak an old variant of the Hungarian language. Zhenya He was not only a teacher of Chinese and a proponent of the Turanist theory, but also a self-made propagandist of the Kuomintang in the Danubian region. After he had returned to China in 1934, he nearly managed to broker the first Sino-Hungarian Treaty of Amity and Commerce. If ratified, the agreement for which he lobbied the Nanjing government relentlessly would have inaugurated diplomatic relations between the two countries some fifteen years before the 1949 mutual recognition of the two People's Republics. It was not He's fault that Admiral Horthy's Hungary joined the Axis Powers to strengthen ties with Japan, the nemesis of Republican China. Had he succeeded, perhaps instead of the phantasmagoric 1940's intermezzo of "Hungarian-Japanese kinship," today's flourishing Sino-Hungarian relations could have been launched well before the era of socialist Eastern Bloc friendship marked by Mátyás Rákosi and Mao Zedong.

### **On Interwar Hungarian and Republican Chinese Cultural Diplomacy**

In his seminal study, Hungarian historian Zsolt Nagy characterized the interwar Hungarian governments' cultural diplomacy as a "public relations campaign *avant la lettre*" (Nagy 2017: 1) whose primary goal was to foster a positive image of Hungary abroad. During this critical period, international "image cultivation," a program of irredentism, was necessary for a country mutilated by the 1920 Peace Treaty of Trianon, leaving it with neither military, economic nor political power, but plenty of grievances. Known by contemporaries as the "Trianon syndrome," irredentism both channeled public opinion in the Horthy regime and dominated the foreign policy agenda of the 1920s-1930s Hungary. From Minister of Culture Kuno von Klebelsberg's educational reforms to the famous and fatal "path dependence" of interwar Hungary's gravitation toward the Axis Powers,<sup>2</sup> everything was supposed to serve the recovery of ancient glory and the lost territories of Greater Hungary. It was not only Budapest that attempted to utilize cultural diplomacy, "the small states' only weapon": Prague, Bucharest and Belgrade continued fighting the war, trading frontline trenches for the battlefields of

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<sup>1</sup> He's name surfaced in various phonetic spellings in different European languages (e.g., Ho China, Hu Dzinja, etc.) and might not have even been his birthname. Zsolt Tokaji's suggestion that the two-syllable personal name "Zhenya 震亞" might actually have been a kind of "revolutionary pseudonym" is a plausible explanation given its meaning of "to shake Asia," a reference that would suit a young Chinese nationalist well. Other than a famous Ming era seal-carver (1530-1604), other modern, politically active persons carried a one syllable version of the name "He Zhen 何震," including a mayor of the coastal city of Fuzhou (1897-1970) and an early feminist and anarchist (1884-1920). However, no evidence connects them to "our" Zhenya He.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase "*kényszerpálya*" was coined by historian György Ránki, and was translated first by Péter Hanák to English as "fixed course" (Hanák 1988).

international media. The instruments of these rivaling cultural diplomacy campaigns included building networks of cultural institutes (e.g., Collegium Hungaricum), establishing journals published in global languages, reimagining tourism along nationalist lines (e.g., Karlovy Vary), as well as producing modern documentary movies and radio broadcasts.

While the term *propaganda* started to lose its formerly neutral connotation during this era, mostly due to the Entente Powers' World War One anti-German media campaigns (Gullace 2011), it remained widely used in the Hungarian-speaking literature well into the 1930s. Shanghai resident Paul Komor, for instance, requested advertising brochures on Hungarian tourism and the effects of the Trianon Treaty, referring to them as "propaganda material." In a newly independent Hungary battered by revolutions and postwar shock, the ideology of revisionist irredentism as the primary motivating and thematizing force seems apparent. At the same time, on the other side of Eurasia the Chinese elite also diagnosed "not being understood," "being misinterpreted," and the overall PR damages of a negative press as the leading causes for the country's troubles.

Like Central European governments, Republican-era Chinese intellectuals educated in the West proposed a project to fix their country's international image. Erupting in the patriotic students' May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement in 1919, the disillusionment and disappointment brought on by the great powers' indifference towards China convinced many of the need to influence public opinion. Replacing the dethroned Qing dynasty in 1911, the young Republic's shaky first steps to prove its commitment to its allies during the Great War seemed to have been in vain. Dividing up their defeated enemies' possessions at the Paris peace table, the Entente Allies granted Germany's former Shandong colony to China's rival, the emerging East Asian hegemon Japan. In his study on the Kuomintang government's image management, Yong Volz shows how many young Republican Chinese intellectuals pointed to "the ignorance of conditions" as the reason for injustices done to China (Volz 2011: 157). Graduates of North American and European universities, these young men aimed to show the world what they saw as China's little-known anticolonial and progressive struggle. Committed to fighting what Edward Said called "discursive violence," the Nanjing Decade's (1927-1937) temporarily consolidated Nationalist government set up the "International Department." Responsible for coordinating the country's foreign publicity, it enlisted journalists to shape public opinion. While in the West, as Volz notes, such propaganda "feels like the betrayal of democracy and journalism," (Volz 2011: 159) Chinese intellectuals regarded their work as a proactive response to a national crisis, a reaction to perceived bias, and a critique of the foreign press coverage of China.

In concluding this rudimentary introduction of Hungary and China's cultural diplomacy background, I would like to make an observation that pertains to an important similarity between the two cases. When, at the beginning of the twentieth century, revolutions swept away the Qing and Habsburg Empires – dynasties that had ruled since the premodern era — both countries found themselves in a challenging PR situation. After Versailles, both countries' intellectual and political leaders blamed international media for the troubles in which they found themselves. Based on the previous diagnosis, elites came to a seemingly reasonable realization: in order to achieve national goals, the propagation of their own narrative and the winning over of the foreign public opinion would be necessary.

### **Paul Komor and Theresia Moll's "national image-cultivation" in Shanghai**

Having introduced the larger context, the focus can now be shifted to a couple of hitherto unknown case studies. Neither the Shanghai image-cultivation campaigns of Paul Komor and Theresia Moll nor Zhenya He's liaising activities in Budapest have been analyzed and evaluated in the relevant scholarly literature. By being presented to the English-speaking readership in this study, they will not only serve as a contribution to pre-1949 Sino-Hungarian relations, but also highlight significant parallels with the present. A Hungarian businessman and longtime China-resident, Paul Komor's (1886-1973) name is memorialized by the descendants of survivors from the 1938-1945 Shanghai Jewish refugee crisis. A virtual no-man's-land where immigration regulations were rarely enforced, wartime Shanghai became the world's only safe haven, ensuring the survival of roughly twenty thousand European Jews who had fled Nazi persecution (Vámos 2004). Paul Komor's earlier efforts in the 1920s, assisting the repatriation of World War One prisoners of war from Siberia via China and organizing the local Hungarian community, were both "training grounds" for this larger humanitarian undertaking. By the 1930s, having risen to the informal position of "quasi-consul" of the Shanghai Hungarians, Paul Komor served the fatherland he had left behind some fifty years earlier in ways beyond humanitarian charity work. Paul's father, a curio-dealer who emigrated from Habsburg Austria-Hungary to semi-colonial East Asia, had laid the foundations for his family's economic stability and solid patriotism. The grandson of a rabbi who moved from provincial Komárom to the Empire's second capital Budapest, Paul Komor was a beneficiary and epitome of the liberal-conservative, assimilated Jewish Hungarian attitude, which he preserved in emigration. After completing primary school in Budapest, Komor received his secondary education in British-dominated Shanghai's German School before continuing his professional training in Hong Kong and Tokyo. His European schooling manifested in his fascination with Schumann's music and Schiller's poetry, as well as the British Victorian classics and masterpieces of Hungarian romanticism that lined his bookshelves.



*Young Paul Komor wearing Hungarian Bugac-style shepherd costume in 1912 in Shanghai (L) (KFP 1912); Middle-aged Paul Komor's 1940 portrait (R) (MNL 1940).*

As a conservative patriot and Habsburg loyalist, Paul Komor could not accept the post-World War One dissolution of Greater Hungary. Although the 1920s Sino-Hungarian negotiations broke down, thereby halting Komor's consular appointment, this obstacle did not stop the leader of the local Hungarian community from continuing to engage in what he saw as his patriotic duties. During the 1930s, he spread anti-Trianon propaganda received from the Budapest diaspora association, the World Congress of Hungarians, within the Yangtze Delta's English-speaking cosmopolitan environment. While holding "enlightening talks" to illustrious audiences, he explained the consequences of the peace treaties concluding the Great War. By writing letters to the editors of Shanghai's largest English-language newspapers, Komor attempted to rectify what he called "entente propaganda," i.e., Hungarian-related reports of the international news agencies. On the occasions of Hungarian national holidays, Komor would organize gatherings for the local Hungarian community, inviting his ethnic compatriots, regardless of their postwar nationality. To help ethnic Hungarians of Czechoslovak nationality avoid confrontations with their Prague-appointed consuls, Komor would typically hold commemorations of the 1848 revolution a few days after the official commemoration day of March 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Gábor Radics Band, a Hungarian gypsy jazz ensemble working on a contract with the infamous Joe Farren's nightclub,<sup>3</sup> also performed at such national banquets. Much more pious but equally patriotic was the March 1939 Catholic Mass celebrated by a Shanghai Hungarian Jesuit priest on the occasion of Transcarpathia cession back to Hungary following two decades of Czechoslovak rule.



*Paul Komor (third from the left) posing with the members of the gypsy jazz ensemble, Radics Band in 1938, Shanghai (MNL 1938).*

The cultural organizer Theresia Moll's (1892-1988) pan-Danubian cultural events provided a broader scope compared to Komor's Trianon-centered Hungarian agenda. Born as Terézia Grünfeld in the Upper Hungarian town of Szenice (today's Senica, Slovakia), Moll trained as an actress, pianist and singer in the Hungarian capital. In the 1920s, following a short career in Budapest and Prague, she accompanied her ex-prisoner of war husband Alexander

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<sup>3</sup> Gábor Radics (1906-1968), Hungarian Gypsy jazz violinist and saxophone-player, trained under composer Jenő Hubay at the Hungarian Music Academy. After playing in Joséphine Baker's "16 Baker Boys" (Simon 1999: 79) between 1936-1938, Radics's ensemble, including Radics Sr. and Jr., Imre Aranyosi, Sándor Stern, Tibor Szálkay, and János Hosszú, worked at the Austrian-born impresario Joe Farren's (b. Josef Pollak) Nightclub in Shanghai's International Settlement (French 2018: 4).

Renner, who, as a physician, decided to stay in the Chinese metropolis after having established an elite clientele among Shanghai's richest. Mentioned often in the Shanghai press as "Mrs. Renner" instead of by her Budapest stage name, Moll initially popularized Hungarian playwrights such as Ferenc Molnár (1878-1952) and Menyhért Lengyel (1880-1974) in the Shanghai German Theatrical Association (*Deutscher Theater Verein*). At the same time, in 1931, on one of her occasional European visits, she also read Chinese poetry translated by the poet Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936)<sup>4</sup> at an event organized by the progressive literary movement, *Nyugat*, in Budapest (Buda 40). However, the major turn in Moll's life came in 1929, when she decided to enlist her cultural activities in the service of charity work. Consisting mostly of Czechoslovak and Austrian nationals, the Danube Countries Women's Association united various ethnicities, including many Hungarians. By bringing together citizens of the Austro-Hungarian successor states, the Association (soon to be led by Theresia Moll), was a unique organization that represented "Danubian culture" and charity activities. While their husbands were busy cultivating their narrower national associations, Moll and her group introduced a much wider vision of the post-Habsburg region. Contemporary Viennese choreography, pieces by Hungarian classical composers, Czech poetry and Slovak folk dance all appear in the advertisements published in the Shanghai press.



*Theresia Moll posing with Hungarian Travel Advertisement in 1938, Shanghai (L) (Komor-MNL 1938); Shanghai English-language press reports on a Czech folk dance performance organized by Moll's Danube Countries Women's Association (R) (NCDN February 16, 1930).*

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<sup>4</sup> Kosztolányi translated Chinese and Japanese poetry via English, French, and German intermediary languages (Zágonyi 246).

Much like today, interwar Shanghai was an important stage for countries of the world to showcase their cultures. However, as we have seen, different actors chose different ways to take advantage of this opportunity for cultural diplomacy and image cultivation. While Paul Komor played by the rules of Horthyist Hungary's Trianon-centered agenda, Theresia Moll was interested in developing a pan-Danubian cultural mission.

### **Zhenya He – Kuomintang Soft Power and Turanism in Budapest**

*"Chinese examination in Budapest" (Pesti Hírlap April 19, 1932); "The first Hungarian-Chinese Grammar Book has been published" (Pesti Hírlap June 8, 1932); "The 'koutyua' barks, the 'nǚ' is 'nǚ';\* no wonder Budapest is beginning to learn Chinese" (Magyarország January 31, 1931)<sup>5</sup>*

The 1930s headlines shown above bear witness to Budapest's journalistic fascination surrounding the Kuomintang propagandist, Zhenya He (1901/1904-?). The first Chinese language instructor at the University of Budapest (today's ELTE), author of the first known Hungarian-Chinese grammar book and teacher of the Chinese course held by the *Turáni Társaság* ['Turanian Society'] was more than a mere wandering intellectual. Between 1928-1934, Zhenya He, a journalist, academic, and dramaturge, applied trendy ideological slogans of his time, thereby anticipating by some fifteen years the approaches that led to the 1949 Sino-Hungarian establishment of diplomatic relations. In contrast to the 1950s Eastern Bloc "socialist fraternity" narrative, He combined Sun Yat-sen's *Sanmin Zhuyi* 三民主義 ['Three Principles of the People'] with Hungarian Turanism<sup>6</sup>, laying the intellectual foundations for what would become the first Hungarian-Chinese Association, a group that aimed to achieve very tangible economic goals. During his six years spent in Hungary, Zhenya He found the perfect cultural-ideological sweet spot to construct a positive image of his homeland in a small Central European country. In 1934, already back in China, he promoted to the Nanjing government a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Hungary:

*The Hungarian government claims that the Hungarians, as a people are Asians. Yet, among all the Asian countries, only Japan sent an envoy to Hungary. To recognize kinship relations, there is also a Japanese-Hungarian Society.<sup>7</sup> The Hungarian people feel that the world treats them unjustly. If China continues to waken small nations in the spirit of the Three Principles of the People, it could prevent Japan from turning Hungary against China (He, AS IMH, RG MFA 1934). (All texts and titles translated from Chinese to English are the work of the author.)*

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<sup>5</sup> \* "Koutyua", a diphthongized variation of the standard Hungarian word 'kutya' for 'dog' hints the Mandarin Chinese 'gǒu 狗', while the Mandarin word for 'woman', 'nǚ 女', evokes the Hungarian 'nő' of the same meaning, for the Hungarian ear.

<sup>6</sup> On the history of Hungarian Turanism see Ablonczy 2016; for a review in English see Laczó, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> *Ri-Xiong Xiehui* (日匈協會).

[匈牙利政府聲稱匈牙利確係亞洲同種民族但亞洲各強國惟日本曾一度遣使來匈認匈與有同種關係遂有日匈協會土番民族聯盟會之組織按匈牙利人民赤為世界以不平等看待民族之一苟中國隨時依照三民主義以喚醒各小民族彼匈牙利自然不受日本之鼓動以反對中國]

Originally planning to become a teacher, the Hangzhou-born young man never earned his degree at Beijing University. Leaving for Europe around 1926, Zhenya He's exact travel itinerary remains unclear. Some sources suggest he first appeared in Paris followed by Stockholm; others claim that he worked at the Chinese Embassy in Berlin and then in Vienna. Conducted at the Foreign Ministry Archives in Taiwan, my own research revealed that the latter itinerary seems to be more plausible, a scenario supported by the fact that He remained in close cooperation with the Chinese ambassador in Vienna, himself not accredited in Budapest. In 1928, if mockingly, He's Turanist career was already predicted by the liberal and anti-government *Pesti Napló's* anonymous cynical journalist who first interviewed him (*Pesti Napló February 12, 1928*). Jokes aside, at a 1930 art exhibition held under the auspices of Minister of Culture Klebelsberg and curated by the Beijing Art Academy's Czech director, a former Austro-Hungarian prisoner of war,<sup>8</sup> Zhenya He's star shone brightly among prominent figures of the contemporary "Eastern opening." Other than the high-level politicians, diplomats, notable Orientalists, celebrated artists and illustrious public figures who made up the audience of the Chinese envoy in Vienna, Tong Deqian 童德乾 was reported to greet the Hungarian nation *mint a kínai nép [testvérét], amely az ezer éves idő és a roppant földrajzi távolság ellenére hűen érzi a nagy múltat és a magyar néppel való történeti emléket*

[‘as a brother of the Chinese people who despite the thousand years and formidable geographical distance has faithfully preserved a great and shared historical past with the Hungarian people’] (*Nemzeti Ujság* November 23, 1930; *Budapesti Hírlap* November 23, 1930).

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<sup>8</sup> For more on Vojtěch Chytil see Čapkova 2013; Pejčochová 2019.



Cover illustration depicting a steppe horseman of the magazine issue publishing Zhenya He's 1937 Chinese-language article (L) (*Zhongwai wenhua* 中外文化 ['Sino-Foreign Culture']: 1937); Zhenya He's 1933 lecture at the Turanian Society in Budapest (R) (*Tolnai Világlapja Március* 22, 1933).

It is unclear how Zhenya He immersed himself so deeply in the Hungarian Turanist subculture. However, it is certain that from 1930 he led the Chinese language course organized by the Turanian Society. Out of his thirty-four students, including the notable art historian and orientalist Zoltán Felvinczi-Takács (1880-1964)<sup>9</sup>, most completed his course, and a half even took the final exam. Budapest's first officially advertised Chinese language course helped Zhenya He gain the support of the University's two Asianist professors and active Turanists, the polyglot Turkologist Vilmos Pröhle (1871-1946) and the China-traveler geographer Jenő Cholnoky (1870-1950) who, in 1931, were lobbying at faculty conferences to appoint He as a language instructor. According to Pröhle, *a kínai hivatalos körök különös rokonszenvvel viseltetnek hazánk iránt* ['the Chinese official circles exhibit a special sympathy towards Hungary'], while Cholnoky argued that *a lektorra igen nagy szükség van tudományos munkáinál, mert a régi kínai írások olvasásában nélkülözhetetlen* ['the instructor is indispensable for scholarly works, to read ancient Chinese script'] (*Jegyzőkönyv* 1932). While, in spite of the support of these professors, the Ministry of Education did not provide Zhenya He financial support, he did receive lodging at the University's prestigious graduate school, the Eötvös Collegium. Finally, in 1932, he was appointed lecturer, alongside such big names as Lajos Ligeti

<sup>9</sup> Zoltán Felvinczi-Takács was the first director of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, that was founded in 1919 in Budapest, by the renowned art collector and patron Ferenc Hopp (1833-1919).

(1902-1987), the young Mongolist and future founder of institutional Hungarian Sinology, and the composer and ethnomusicologist Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) (Almanach 1931).

Due to the limited scope of this study, out of Zhenya He's various activities popularizing China's culture and its political leadership in the Budapest press, radio broadcasts, as well as in academic and popular talks, I can only offer a glimpse of his collaboration with Menyhért Lengyel, a playwright whose work often drew upon "Eastern" themes. The failure of the 1931 Budapest premiere of Lengyel's play, *A kínai lány* ['The Chinese Girl'], later performed in Berlin by Hollywood's first Chinese actress, Anna May Wong (Huang Liushuang 黃柳霜, 1905-1961), very probably can be attributed to Zhenya He's overly politicized dramaturgical suggestions. According to the press reviews, the show (also attended by Admiral Miklós Horthy, the Regent of Hungary) was only financially saved by the seasonal subscribers. Apparently, despite celebrity actor Gyula Csontos' (1883-1945) starring role, the Hungarian audience was not receptive to the Kuomintang's nationalist criticism of Chinese warlords (Gáspár 7).



Actress Anna Tőkés with actors József Timár (L) and Gyula Csontos (R) masked as "Orientals" in photos of Lengyel's play *A kínai lány* ['The Chinese Girl'] in 1931, at the Budapest National Theater (*Pesti Napló Képes Műmelléklet* February 8, 1931:2; *Színházi Élet* February 15-21:26).

Although the play was a fiasco, He's questionable role as a dramaturge did not prevent him from advancing in his career as a propagandist and middleman for a Sino-Hungarian diplomatic agreement. A year after his 1932 appointment as chief correspondent for Central Europe by the Nanjing government, He ramped up his activities in Budapest by fostering the establishment of the first *Zhong Xiong Xiehui* 中匈協會 ['Hungarian-Chinese Association']. Bringing together big names from contemporary Hungarian academic, cultural, and public milieux, the Association's declared goal was to cultivate what they called as "traditional Chinese-Hungarian kinship relations," as well as bilateral academic and economic cooperation (He, AS IMH, RG MFA, 1933). In the 1930s, while animating the imagination of some Hungarian entrepreneurs, in the absence of a bilateral commercial treaty, the Chinese market

remained largely out of reach. The Hungarian-Chinese Association gave rise to hopes for corporations wanting to sell weaponry to the KMT government. However, despite more than a decade of fruitless negotiations, Chinese and Hungarian diplomats could never bring the treaty to ratification before,<sup>10</sup> in the years leading up to World War Two, Nanjing and Budapest finally found themselves on opposite sides of global alliance systems.

In 1934, to better promote his association's goal, Zhenya He left Hungary for China via the port of Trieste on one of the Italian ocean liners that four years later would also carry the Jewish refugees Paul Komor would help save. He had already been in China when he wrote his previously quoted petition calling the Nanjing government's attention to the public relations potential of Hungarian Turanism for China. We learn from Paul Komor's correspondence, found in the Hungarian National Archives, that while in Shanghai, He continued his activities that he had begun in Budapest. Established during Wang Jingwei's 汪精衛 collaborationist government in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, Zhenya He's Sino-Hungarian Association had recruited local Hungarians to its membership, including Theresia Moll's husband, the revered physician Alexander Renner. In the 1930s, newspapers from the surrounding *Jiangnan* 江南 area mentioned He's name as a Chinese diplomat who went to Hungary, was a professor in Budapest, and became an expert of Sino-Hungarian relations. Once, he was reported to have given a lecture to Suzhou high school students about Hungary, with the famous anarcho-syndicalist-turned Japanese collaborator political activist Jiang Kanghu 江亢虎 (See "Zhongwai Wenhua" ['Sino-Foreign Culture'] June 21, 1935:7; "Zhongwai Wenhua" ['Sino-Foreign Culture'] April 23, 1935:6; "He Zhenya," November 17, 1935:9; "Wushi tan Hu bu" ['Yangtze Delta Talk on Feeding the Tiger'], January 14, 1935:8; "Goutong zhongwaijiao" ['Sino-Foreign Cultural Relations'], April 15, 1935:6; "Guo xuehui zhi gongkai" ['National Learning Society's Public Talk'], January 11, 1935:7). Unfortunately, after some 1937 journal articles of his, written on Central European countries (See "Jinri zhi Aodaliya Gongheguo" ['The Austrian Republic Today']; "Xiongnu yu Xiongyali" ['Huns and Hungary']; "Ou zhan hou" ['After the Great War']), Zhenya He's name disappears from the historical record. However, his 1935 booklet *Xiongnu yu Xiongyali* ['Huns and Hungarians'] is still circulating on the Chinese internet, referenced by obscure amateur websites discussing Hun/*Xiongnu*-Hungarian kinship theories.

Except for Zsolt Tokaji's hitherto unpublished research on the Hungarian press reception of Zhenya He, to date no study is known to have dealt with him and his activities. In this paper, I have sought to highlight the trailblazing role this adventurous young man played in the history of Sino-Hungarian relations. His cultural propaganda, that combined Hungarian Turanism with the Chinese Three Principles of the People, is unique and unprecedented. By learning about Zhenya He, it is possible to trace back post-World War Two Hungarian Sinology's roots to a time some fifteen years earlier than its generally accepted beginning.

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<sup>10</sup> "Zhong xiong xiehui ji zhong xiong shangwu qiaowu diaocha qingxing wenjian deng 中匈協會及中匈商務僑務調查情形文件 ['Survey of the Sino-Hungary Association's and Trade & Overseas Community's Affairs']," 1933-1937, AS IMH, RG MFA, "Zhong xiong shangyue 中匈商約 ['The Sino-Hungarian Commercial Treaty']," 11-32-04-00-001.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown three methodologically different cultural diplomacy agendas employed by three representatives of two different countries. Paul Komor and Theresia Moll each approached the post-Habsburg Central European region based on their contrasting approaches to nationality and nationalism. In contrast to Komor's patriotic, Hungary-centered irredentism, Moll promoted a pan-Danubian culture in Shanghai. In the end, however, it was their humanitarian efforts, not their cultural mission, that left a lasting mark discernible to this day. While Moll's relief work in the women's association has hitherto not received much publicity, Paul Komor's life-saving efforts are justly memorialized worldwide. Komor's mission did bear fruit, albeit not the way he had imagined. Today, instead of the Trianon Peace Treaty's revision, Komor himself has become a pillar of Hungarian cultural diplomacy in China.

Like Komor, Zhenya He never saw the result of his work. His efforts to bring about an official Sino-Hungarian agreement were seemingly in vain. However, when looking at the blooming bilateral relations and Hungarian Sinology in the post-1949 period, the indirect role Zhenya He played is undeniable. Recovering the traces of his work at the then newly founded East Asian Institute at the University of Budapest could be the subject of future research. One thing is certain: despite their obvious ideological differences, He's supreme leader Chiang Kai-shek would have been satisfied to see today's strong, sovereign, great power China, a goal he fought for all through his life. In Zhenya He, we can see the first cultivator of a positive China-image in Hungary.

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