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A Hungarian Old China Hand and the End of Empire: Loyalty Struggles in Interwar Shanghai's Migrant Community

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Abstract

This article explores the consequences of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's end through the tumultuous biography of a philanthropic entrepreneur and quasi-consul community leader known today for assisting thousands of Jewish refugees during World War II. Focusing on Paul Komor (1886–1973) and the migrant community of Shanghai Hungarians, the article contends that postimperial diasporas preserved a piece of empire in their commitment to Jewish emancipation, imperialist nationalism, multiple loyalties, and political nostalgia. It also argues that diasporic networks and charitable actions communicated political and national loyalties while creating and defining the boundaries of the community. Presenting original research involving sources in multiple languages from China, Hungary, the U.S., the U.K., and the Netherlands, the article traces the fortunes of a Jewish Hungarian family in colonial Shanghai, shows the limits of its son's charity-rooted advancement in community leadership, sheds light on the seemingly contradictory political ideas of a postimperial expatriate to explain his complicated relationship with his kinstate, and analyzes the institutionalization of communal charity and the competing prerequisite definitions of postimperial national belonging.

Keywords: China; Shanghai Jewish Refugees; Habsburg empire; interwar Hungary; post-Habsburg Diasporas; László Hudec; Paul Komor

Introduction

“The Moor has done his duty; the Moor can go,” quoted a disillusioned Paul Komor Schiller,¹ an assimilated Jewish Hungarian in China grappling with what he saw as his country's dismissal of him after decades of patriotic dedication and humanitarian service. In 1941, at the time of his resignation letter to the Budapest diaspora organization, he was buried in what he later became known for —aid work assisting Shanghai's ca. 20,000 World War II (WWII) Jewish refugees. The International Committee for Granting Relief to European Refugees (later known as the International Committee for the Organization of European Immigrants in China), which was backed by wealthy Jews from Baghdad² and their mostly post-Habsburg Central European fellows, came to be so closely associated

¹Paul Komor, “To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau,” 13 March 1941. Hungarian National Archives (*Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár*; MNL, OL), World Federation of Hungarians (*Magyarok Világszövetsége*; P975), China (*Kína*; I–22), Budapest, Hungary; 1–3; “*The Moor Has Done His Duty, The Moor Can Go*,” was a popular expression among theatergoers in 1920s Hungary. Imre Püspöki, “A Mór Megtette Kötelességét, a Mór Mehet,” in *Magyar Színművészeti Lexikon [Hungarian Theatrical Lexicon]*, ed. Aladár Schöpflin (Budapest, 1930), 3:285.

²In the late nineteenth century, Sephardic (more precisely Baghdadi or “Oriental,” Iraqi) Jews came to China from Ottoman territories, via India, where they became British subjects, establishing themselves as merchants, traders, and bankers. Most famous were the two powerful Shanghai families, the Sassoons and the Kadoories. S. R. Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in the Age of Nationalism*, Brill's Series in Jewish Studies 69 (Leiden, 2021).

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with its trustee, that most refugees just called it the “Komor Committee.”³ Before Komor’s 1942 arrest by the Japanese occupiers on claims of being a British spy, he had spent a lifetime as a philanthropist in colonial Shanghai.

However, hardly anyone knows that, between 1896 and 1948, in what was then called the “Far East,” Komor wore many seemingly contradictory hats. He was a businessperson who ignored his own interests for his honorary quasi-consular service, a twice-uprooted voluntary patron of refugees, an expatriate preoccupied with distant domestic politics, and a patriotic propagandist in a cosmopolitan city defending a country that abandoned him. As a Germanophone Jewish Hungarian who grew up in British-dominated Shanghai, the complexity of Komor’s allegiances, while not unusual among imperial subjects, presents a unique mixture of Habsburg multiethnicity and British global imperial subjecthood. While Komor’s education tied him to German-speaking culture and his family raised him in the post-Austro-Hungarian Compromise era’s liberal-conservative, Magyar nationalism-infused, culture, he felt most at home in the Chinese treaty port.

Much like today, Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century was a global metropolis, the pride of Chinese modernity that gave birth to the Chinese Communist Party; but unlike today, it was also a symbol of foreign subjugation that embraced free market capitalism. Since the mid-nineteenth century’s Anglo-French imperialist encroachment transformed the sleepy provincial town into an insomniac cosmopolitan entrepôt, the city and its hinterland lived almost parallel realities. Observing the bloody turbulence of the republican attempts and warlordism that followed the last imperial dynasty’s collapse in 1911 from their mansions’ rooftops, the extraterritorial residents of the British-, American-, and French-controlled zones were only really forced to reckon with the East Asian realities when Japan occupied the International Settlement in 1941. As the Japanese grip tightened around them in the 1930s, the interwar European status quo that China’s Western colonialists had built “at home” was simultaneously challenged by the emerging alliance of the revisionist powers Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.⁴

Since its beginnings, Shanghai had been a destination for immigrants, be they starving peasants from the countryside, overseas colonial subjects, or persecuted refugees.⁵ Having encountered the first group only as service personnel, Paul Komor and others like him belonged to the second group while focusing his activities on the third. Imagine the scene where formerly Ottoman-subject Baghdadi Jewish traders sat in a bar on the Shanghai waterfront (known as the Bund) next to the Austro-Hungarian Komors, all having followed the routes of the colonial empires, finally settling on the Yangzi-tributary Huangpu River. On their way, they would have been saluted by Annamite, Irish, and Sikh policemen; they would sit with Dutch, Mexican, and Portuguese consular officials, all entertained by Philippine musicians and Russian taxi dancers. While for some, such a vignette evoked a cosmopolitan fantasy, for many, including most of those mentioned here, colonial Shanghai was a society ruthlessly structured by race and class. Paul Komor, despite being one of the privileged, could relate to the waves of European refugees constantly trickling in under the benevolent ambiguity of the mixed-sovereignty territories. Not only had his wife’s Russian family escaped the pogroms, but he was also introduced to humanitarianism while caring for Austro-Hungarian refugee prisoners of war (POWs),⁶ only to become known for aiding Jewish emigrants from Nazi-occupied Central Europe.⁷

This article uses some key aspects of Paul Komor’s (1886–1973) biography to discuss how the need for humanitarian relief and the consular void left by the dissolved Habsburg Empire elevated a philanthropic entrepreneur into a quasi-consul community leader. Altruism, conviction, and self-interest

³Irene Eber, ed., *Jewish Refugees in Shanghai 1933–1947: A Selection of Documents*, Archiv jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur 3 (Göttingen, 2018).

⁴Robert Bickers, “Shanghai and Others: British Communities in China, 1843–1957,” in *Settlers and Expatriates* (Oxford, 2010), 270–301; James Carter, *Champions Day: The End of Old Shanghai* (New York, 2020).

⁵Marcia R. Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort: The Diaspora Communities of Shanghai* (Stanford, 2003).

⁶Mátyás Mervay, “Austro–Hungarian Refugee Soldiers in China,” *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 12, no. 1 (12 July 2018): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2018.1466512>.

⁷Péter Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai During World War II,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 57, no. 1 (2004): 55–70, <https://doi.org/10.1556/AOrient.57.2004.1.4>.

motivated Komor, whose relief system filled the gap after World War I (WWI), allowing him to remain at the center of his community, gain prestige, and the chance to advance his business. In a racially structured colonial environment where real and perceived enemies of Hungary abounded, in addition to his already wounded nationalist pride over the loss of much of his country's historic territories, he also feared the embarrassment of his compatriots losing their esteem as white foreigners. As the article explores, Komor was repeatedly forced to navigate interwar political pitfalls in China and at home, where antisemitism threatened his rise and status. Ultimately, the article argues that diasporic networks and charity played a pivotal role in creating and maintaining the boundaries of the Hungarian community in China. However, in the process, the informal relief structure deployed to improve the image of interwar Hungarians proved crucial to aid thousands of Jewish refugees during WWII. While Komor's 1938–42 activities in the International Committee are not the focus of this article, it is the author's intention to highlight the organizing skills Komor accumulated before his 1940 ousting from the Hungarian Relief Fund (HRF)—skills that turned out to be crucial in the larger context of the Central European Jewish refugee aid.

From a historiographical point of view, the consequences of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's end abroad have rarely been explored.⁸ Thus, a question remains: How did the multifold and conflicting legacies of the Habsburg monarchy play out in the overseas *Kolonie* communities?⁹ Following Pieter Judson's reminder that World War I didn't make "imperial ways of thinking" disappear overnight,¹⁰ this article contends that postimperial diasporas, like the Shanghai Hungarian migrant community, preserved a piece of empire in the aspirations of Jewish emancipation, imperialist nationalism, multiple loyalties, and political nostalgia. In studying borderlands, localisms, and regionalisms, many scholars have already challenged the nation-state's formerly privileged position; postimperial diasporas offer a new, uncharted territory. Such inquiries might reveal the central task of community-building and how community-builders managed to become citizens of the successor states or failed to do so while maintaining a stance marked by "national indifference." In this article, the conflict between the exclusionary Magyar nationalist Paul Komor and the Slovak-Hungarian architect László Hudec over the possibility of multiple national loyalties reminds us of Tara Zahra's description of the struggle between nationalist agents and the "imagined noncommunity" of nationally indifferent "opportunists."¹¹ Komor, filling the role of the nationalist agent, interpreted Hudec's juggling of Czechoslovak and Hungarian national identities as indifferent and villainous opportunism; Hudec in return allegedly called Komor a "mad [Magyar] chauvinist."¹² To grasp the conflicting putative essence of these individuals, this article uses the term "loyalty," a fluid concept that underscores individual agency, following Martin Schulze-Wessel's proposition to explore collective forms of consciousness without the baggage of essentializing identity politics.¹³ Here, "loyalty" is conceived as a

⁸In Carmela Patrias's study of interwar Canada's Hungarian immigrant community, the new politicization of societies emerging from the postwar turmoil plays out as an unprecedented left-right political polarization caused by the revolutions and their backlashes in the kin state as it showed up in the diaspora. Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada* (Montreal, 1994). In Part I of Peter Becker and Natasha Wheatley's integrated history of the interwar European order, discussing the Habsburg Empire's legacies in supra- and transnational governance, several authors show how "actors and networks" "rescaled" their earlier projects by rebuilding the infrastructure of governance following the imperial collapse. Peter Becker and Natasha Wheatley, eds., *Remaking Central Europe: The League of Nations and the Former Habsburg Lands* (Oxford, 2021).

⁹Note the confusing Central European usage of the term "colony." Influenced by the two senses the German term *Kolonie* carries, sources from the non-colonial Czechoslovak and Hungarian contexts often used it in its weaker sense. While its stronger meaning suggests the conquered, exploited, dependent territory English readers are most familiar with, in the post-Habsburg region, the Czech *kolonie* and the Hungarian *kolónia* could have meant any kind of settlement, and thus their overseas compatriots' enclaves. See more on terminology in Kristin Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland and Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor, 2012), 3.

¹⁰Pieter M. Judson, "'Where Our Commonality is Necessary ...': Rethinking the End of the Habsburg Monarchy," *Austrian History Yearbook* 48 (2017): 1–21.

¹¹Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119.

¹²Paul Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau," 17 June 1940, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 1009.

¹³Martin Schulze-Wessel, "Loyalität als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept: Zur Einleitung," in *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, ed. Schulze-Wessel (München, 2004), 10.

dynamic, plural, emotional but conscious attachment that informs one's daily decisions. Paul Komor's tumultuous biography exemplifies that one can hold multiple such allegiances and choose between them in response to communal inclusion and exclusion.

In four sections, this article introduces Paul Komor, the most important post-Habsburg Shanghailanders navigating his allegiances through his relief work.¹⁴ Section one traces the various loyalties of a Jewish Hungarian family in colonial Shanghai, navigating imperial subjecthood, ethnonational belonging, and antisemitism through the language of philanthropy. Section two shows the limits of charity-rooted advancement in community leadership, as it explains why the grassroots movement of Shanghai Hungarians to formalize their community leader's consular function ultimately failed. Section three sheds light on the seemingly contradictory political ideas of a postimperial expatriate to explain his complicated relationship with his kinstate. Finally, section four introduces the institutionalization of communal charity and the competing prerequisite definitions of postimperial national belonging. The article argues that in the post-Habsburg migrant community of Shanghai Hungarians, charitable actions communicated one's loyalties while creating and defining the boundaries of the community. In the absence of formal state representation, philanthropists like Paul Komor could rise to community leadership in the diaspora.

This article presents original research involving sources in various languages. In addition to the rich collections of police, consular, and diplomatic material found in the Shanghai Municipal Archives and the American (NARA), Hungarian (MNL), British (BNA), and Dutch (NL-HaNA) National Archives, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, published POW memoirs, abundant reporting from the Hungarian newspapers (Arcanum Newspapers), and the English-speaking China press (ProQuest Historical Newspapers and Brill Primary Sources) also informed this reconstruction of the two decades between Komor's return to Shanghai in 1920 and the 1940 dissolution of the HRF.

A Jewish Austro-Hungarian Family's Allegiances in Semi-Colonial China

A family of Jewish Hungarian entrepreneurs and philanthropists, the Shanghai Komors hailed from Austria-Hungary, living through the golden age and twilight period of Western imperialism in China. From the 1890s, Isidor Komor (1860–1942) ran one of East Asia's most famous curio businesses, enabling his son Paul, a philanthropist, to play a fundamental role in organizing China's post-WWI Hungarian migrant community and the Shanghai Jewish refugee relief effort during WWII. The two towering figures of their national community came from a family whose ascendance was due as much to empire as to their entrepreneurial spirit. In this way, the Komors were in the mold of those Baghdadi (Sephardi) Jewish merchant dynasties that dominated the British Empire's trade and finance in Asia. The Habsburg Empire's belated ambition to join the colonial scramble in East Asia offered the impetus for the Komors to venture into China.¹⁵ Had they been given more time and the infrastructure of a maritime empire, the family might have risen to become tycoons like the Sassoons and the Kadoories. Instead, they were memorialized not for accumulating legendary riches and spreading influence across the colonial world but for their relief work.

Paul Komor descended from an assimilated Jewish Hungarian family that rose in prominence thanks to the liberal policies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His grandfather, Salamon Kohn (1830–86), started as a provincial rabbi in Western Hungary before becoming a teacher at the

¹⁴ As a clearly racist distinction, the moniker for Western (white European and North American) settlers and expatriates living in colonial Shanghai was "Shanghailanders," while Chinese residents of the city were called "Shanghainese." Whether a national of a non-colonial (Eastern) European country could be considered a Shanghaider was just as ambiguous and subject to case-by-case decisions as, for instance, the same determination for a citizen of Japan.

¹⁵ Sándor Józsa, *Kína és az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia [China and Austria-Hungary]* (Budapest, 1966); Monika Lehner, *Österreich-Ungarn und der "Boxeraufstand" in China* (Innsbruck, 2003); Michael Falser, *Habsburgs Going Global: The Austro-Hungarian Concession in Tientsin/Tianjin in China (1901–1917)*, Veröffentlichungen zur Kunstgeschichte 22 (Vienna, 2021).

National Institute for the Education of Jewish Teachers (*Országos Izraelita Tanítóképző-Intézet*) in Budapest. His eldest of seven children, Isidor, was an adventurous entrepreneur who established the Shanghai branch of Kuhn & Komor, the enterprise his brother and cousin had founded.¹⁶ Before the family's post-WWI expulsion from China and the declining demand for curios eventually transformed their business, catering to Westerners' fancy for "exotic" artefacts was a flourishing industry that provided well for the Komors. In prewar Shanghai, Isidor's charity donations indicated his family's growing wealth as well as their conflicting and changing allegiances. Their first commitment was to the Jewish community, prompted by the horrible news of pogroms in the Russian Empire.¹⁷ In the following years, Shanghai's English-language Zionist newspaper reported on Isidor's various international and local contributions, including to POWs of the Judaic faith during the Russo-Japanese War¹⁸ and to the Shanghai Jewish School.¹⁹

With WWI and the family trying to balance three conflicting imperial loyalties, the Komors' attention to Jewish causes took a backseat. Since prewar times, they had nurtured ties with the British and German colonial establishments while upholding their ultimate loyalty to their emperor-king, Francis Joseph. While residing in Allied territory,²⁰ young Paul, a ratepayer in Shanghai's British-dominated International Settlement,²¹ participated in his father's relief efforts for the first time. Between 1915 and 1919, they helped Austro-Hungarian POWs with remittances in Russia's Siberian internment camps and housed escapees passing through China.²² Despite being nationals of one of the Central Powers, they also sent Christmas presents to British men in the European trenches.²³ Recognizing their aid work, in October 1918, Archduke Franz Salvator awarded Isidor one of Austria-Hungary's last decorations.²⁴ British gratitude was much less generous; on 13 March 1919, on the lobbying of the Imperial Russian Consul General in Shanghai,²⁵ father and son were expelled, nominally by the Chinese authorities, along with over 4,000 "enemy subjects." The war of empires and the subsequent

¹⁶Members of the Kohn (from 1881 on Magyarized as Komor) family joined the lucrative curio business of the Orient via their relatives, the Kuhns (Kuhn & Komor stores were established across colonial Asia). Rabbi Kohn Salamon's two sons, Siegfried (Szigfrid) and Isidor (Izidor), arrived in Yokohama in the 1880s. Isidor and his family later moved to Shanghai. Sándor Kiss, *Japán vonzásában: Magyarok, akik szerették Japánt* [In Allurement of Japan: Hungarians who loved Japan] (Budapest, 2017), 120–23.

¹⁷"Shanghai Zionist Association ... Complete Report," *Israel's Messenger* (IM), 18 November 1904.

¹⁸"Anglo-Jewish Association, Shanghai Branch, Statement of Account for 1903–1904," IM, 22 April 1904; "Russian Jewish Fund," IM, 1 December 1905.

¹⁹"Shanghai Jewish School. First Annual Report," IM, 19 May 1904. The school was founded in 1903 by the wealthy Sephardi Abraham and Kadoorie families but was later known simply as "Kadoorie School." During WWII, it educated hundreds of refugee children.

²⁰China declared war on Germany and Austria Hungary only in August 1917, before that date, the Komors lived, technically, on neutral territory controlled by a belligerent nation.

²¹"Election of Council. List of Persons Qualified to Be Elected as Councillors for the Foreign Settlement of Shanghai for the Municipal Year 1918," *The Municipal Gazette*, 14 March 1918. From the 1860s, the ratepayers of the International Settlement controlled Shanghai's British-American-dominated area through the Shanghai Municipal Council, without whose agreement the de jure authority British consul had no actual power. The International Settlement was not part of the British Empire proper; its affairs were supervised by the Foreign Office. Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (New York, 2004), 53.

²²See the interview with Artillery Lieutenant István Garai and the memoir of Royal Hungarian Honvéd Reserve Officer Ervin Bokor in Aladár Fráter, "Magyar tüzérhadnagy szökése szibériai fogságából. Gara István rendkívüli sorsa [A Hungarian Artillery Lieutenant's Escape from His Siberian Captivity]," *Budapesti Hírlap*, 3 July 1915; and Ervin Bokor, *Menekülés a szibériai fogságából Japánon és Anglián keresztül. Két magyar tiszt viszontagságai* [Escaping from the Siberian Captivity via Japan and Britain. The Vicissitudes of two Hungarian Officers] (Budapest, 1919), 370. See POWs writing letters for financial help to the Shanghai Komor in the literary representation of Rodion Markovits, *A szibériai garnizon* [The Siberian Garrison] (Bucharest, 2017) [Original ed.: Budapest, 1927].

²³"Xmas Gifts for British Soldiers and Sailors," *The North China Daily News* (NCDN), 5 December 1914.

²⁴Isidor Komor received his decoration, the "Decoration for Services to the Red Cross, Merit Cross, 2nd Class (*Ehrenzeichen für Verdienste um das Rote Kreuz, Ehrenkreuz II. Klasse*)" weeks before the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. Kiss, *Japán vonzásában*, 265.

²⁵"V. F. Grosse, Russian Consul General to E. Fraser, British Consul General in Shanghai Re: Paul Komor's Expulsion," 26 February 1919. British National Archives, Foreign Office (BNA FO) via Archives Direct FO 671/455.

surge of patriotism—fueled by prewar liberal emancipatory policies—might have prompted Isidor and Paul to support causes related to their national (Hungarian), residential (Shanghai British), and cultural (Germanophone and Jewish) affiliations. Ironically, none of these three communities reciprocated their support. It was a bitter experience for two generations of what they saw as the repeated betrayal of their faithfulness.

War and expulsion didn't destroy Paul Komor's connections in Shanghai, where he felt most at home, having witnessed its growth from a small colonial entrepôt to a global metropolis. He studied, matured, and married there, and before 1919, he left only for professional training and business trips.²⁶ After almost a year spent as an unemployed exile in Weimar Germany, on 21 February 1920, Paul secured his Hungarian passport and British visa and returned to China.²⁷ In the 1920s, the second-generation "Shanghailanders" kept his membership in the Municipal Council and remained woven into the fabric of foreign Shanghai's social network, which would greatly benefit his future philanthropic engagements.²⁸ With his wife, Adèle Rogalsky, a Russian-speaking former bank clerk of Crimean Jewish origins from Manchuria, they raised two sons in the International Settlement's Western suburbs. In the 1930s, they experienced the growing Japanese political and military pressure, the erosion of Western power, and the war that China fought for its survival.²⁹ In 1942, while their older son flew raids as a US pilot in the Pacific, the Japanese arrested Paul, alleging, without ever proving, that he was a British spy.³⁰ In 1948, convinced by the turmoil of the Civil War and the prospect of a hostile, anti-foreign communist regime, the family finally left Shanghai for the United States.³¹

Paul Komor's third source of imperial loyalty, in addition to Austro-Hungarian emancipatory liberalism and British colonial experience, was his embeddedness in the German-speaking community through his family's Central European linguistic and cultural roots. At fourteen, young Paul was enrolled in the local German school, the same institution to which he would send his sons a generation later.³² Opened in 1895 by the German Lutheran Missionary Society (*Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein*), the "Bismarck Schule"—from 1911 "Kaiser Wilhelm Schule"—was, in the founders' minds, "a bulwark for the preservation and fostering of the German language and spirit in the Far East." Consequently, the school admitted only a maximum of 20 percent of students from non-German nationalities, excluding children from Chinese and mixed German-Chinese backgrounds³³ but including "Austrians," such as Paul Komor, whose Germanophone family background allowed for easier integration. Students were taught a classic Prussian *Realschule* curriculum, and except for occasional references to Asia in geography lessons, they advanced as if they were in any town of the German Empire.

²⁶In Hong Kong and Tokyo, possibly at his uncles' businesses. Carroll Lunt, *The China Who's Who 1924 (Foreign)*. A *Biographical Dictionary* (Shanghai, 1924), 146.

²⁷Paul Komor's Passport, issued by Mr. Fischer, Hungarian Consul in Hamburg, Germany, on 12 June 1919; Paul Komor Diaries, Entry 28 December 1919. Komor Family Papers, Private Collection of Valerie Komor 1885–2012, New York City, NY, B1/F24.

²⁸Komor raised funds from the Shanghai British Race Club. F.E.H. Groenman, "To A.W. Olsen, Secretary, Shanghai Race Club about Supporting Application of Hungarian Relief Fund for Assistance," 18 June 1926. MNL, OL, K672, 1.cs., No. 1499). He closely cooperated with the Municipal Police. Several reports are in "Central European (Jewish) Refugees," 1938–1942. NARA via BiNuAs, Records of the CIA, Records of the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP), RG263_M1750-16, 17, 18, D5422(c).

²⁹Until the 1941 occupation of Shanghai, for the first four years of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), the city's foreign-controlled areas did not experience the direct effects of the fighting devastating the rest of the country. Non-Chinese residents of Shanghai continued to lead mostly undisturbed lives as if they were on a peaceful island surrounded by war.

³⁰Paul Komor Diaries, Entry 27 January 1944. Komor Family Papers; and "Paul Komor's Biography" based on Valerie Komor's unpublished biographical sketch of Paul Komor, 2000, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), accessed 20 April 2020, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1131187>.

³¹Komor died in 1973 in Santa Cruz, CA. "Paul Komor's Obituary," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 1 May 1973, 28.

³²No school records for Leonard Komor are available, but we know that Peter Komor was a student in 1928 at the Shanghai German School (KWS). Studienwerk Deutsches Leben in Ostasien e.V. "Bertha Trumpf mit den Erstklässern am Schuleingang der Kaiser Wilhelm Schule Shanghai im vorläufigen Gebäude in der Jessfield Road," Photo 'P5998,' 1928, accessed 3 May 2020), <https://studeo-ostasiendeutsche.de/fotothek/china/shanghai/1928-1/408-p5998>.

³³Stefan Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora: The Greater German Empire, 1871–1914* (London, 2014), 247–48.

They learned English and French as foreign languages, but not Mandarin,³⁴ and were instilled with patriotism and loyalty to the German emperor.³⁵

Besides strong devotion to the fatherland and the sovereign, the teenager Paul Komor gained much more from visiting the German school. A confident literacy in the language is apparent in the correspondence he kept with authorities in his adult years. Through the 1920s and 1930s, even when corresponding with Hungarian addressees, Komor preferred to write in either German or English. His literary references also betray a high literacy in German culture, e.g., his Schiller quote at the beginning of this article. This environment, just as much as the contemporary revival of classical music appreciation, might have also influenced Paul Komor's lifelong fascination with Schumann and other German composers.³⁶ In 1924, choosing Shanghai's German Lutheran Church for his baptism, the adult Komor's conversion to Christianity also occurred within the same cultural milieu.³⁷

With Hitler's 1933 takeover, much of the "non-Aryan" family's ties to Shanghai's German community were severed; however, some old, seemingly "too well" functioning connections raised suspicion in anti-Nazi circles. Old social networks, including the membership at the German Country Club (*Deutscher Garten Klub*),³⁸ might have lubricated channels with the German consular staff, but that he was a "Gestapo henchman" because he, perhaps overly cautiously, had an anti-Nazi play's performance cancelled, was a ludicrous and unsubstantiated allegation.³⁹ While most of Shanghai's non-Jewish German residents embraced the racist ideology of the Third Reich, Komor repeatedly criticized it and its adherents.⁴⁰ His 1938–41 International Committee's initial functioning as a "registration office" for the German consular authorities was,⁴¹ as Hoss and Freyeisen discussed in their respective articles, a bona fide collaboration to obtain protection for still legally German citizen Jews from their own consulate.⁴² Such public anonymous allegations aside, the family's well-documented Jewish, British, and German allegiances were integral to Paul Komor, whose identity becomes even more complicated when his relationship with Hungary is considered.

³⁴Having spent a lifetime in China surrounded by his indigenous employees, Komor most probably learned "Chinese." While sources indicate that other members of his family living in East Asia spoke the vernacular, the level of Paul's fluency as well as whether he spoke Chinese Pidgin English, the Wu dialect, commonly known as "Shanghainese," or the standardized official language Mandarin remains unclear.

³⁵Epitomized by the pompous annual birthday celebrations of Emperor Wilhelm II. Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora*, 247–48.

³⁶Komor shared his passion for classical music with the architect László Hudec, who, after his arrival in Shanghai as a refugee POW, used to lodge in the Komor family's home. Komor and Hudec would listen to the gramophone together and enjoy Schumann and other classics. Kiss, *Japán vonzásában*, 327.

³⁷"Paul Komor's Biography," USHMM.

³⁸In 1932, the Shanghai Hungarian community's 2nd 15 March national holiday lunch celebration, organized by Komor, was held at the German Country Club, where Komor was a member. Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: March 15 Celebration Attendees," 18 March 1932. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 114.; "Today (...)" NCDN, 15 April 1932.

³⁹In his anxious preoccupation with not provoking the German authorities, Komor zealously policed any politically sensitive activities among the refugees, helping to cancel the critical theater piece "*Die Masken fallen*" after its 9 November 1940, premier ("An Auswärtige Amt [To the German Foreign Office], gez. [signed by] Fischer, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PAAA) [Political Archive of the German Federal Foreign Office], R 100031, cited in Christiane Hoss, "Der lange Arm des Deutschen Reiches. Zu den Ausbürgerungen von Emigrantinnen und Emmigranten in Shanghai," in *Exil Shanghai, 1938–1947: jüdisches Leben in der Emigration*, eds. Georg Armbrüster, Michael Kohlstruck, and Sonja Mühlberger (Teetz, 2000), 165–83, 171). Freyeisen mentions a "suspicion" of his working with the Gestapo raised in the "Shanghai press," but doesn't cite any direct reference. Astrid Freyeisen, "Das Verhältnis zwischen alteingesessenen und vertriebenen jüdischen Deutschen in Shanghai," in *Exil Shanghai*, 84–102, 94. So far, only one article has been recovered that mentions Komor's intervention to stop the play after having been contacted by the German Consulate General. "Gestapo Threat Stops Shanghai Jewish Play," *The China Weekly Review*, 23 November 1940, 406.

⁴⁰Komor, "To Kékessy SJ, Shanghai Re: Hungarian politics, antisemitism," 28 May 1938. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 809.

⁴¹Michel Speelman, "Report on Jewish Refugee Problem in Shanghai," Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai," 21 June 1939. Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), 1933–1944 New York Collection, China: Administration, General, ID 455227.

⁴²Komor was unaware of German consular officials being instructed as early as 1937 not to assist Jews beyond formal protection. "Auswärtiges Amt an alle Auslandsvertretungen [The German Foreign Office to all diplomatic missions abroad]. 14.6.1937, gez. [signed by] Bülow-Schwante in: PAAA, Istanbul Emigranten Bd.1," cited in Hoss, "Der lange Arm des Deutschen Reiches," 169.

The Emergence of a Quasi-Consul

To understand Paul Komor's constitutive role in his community, it is necessary to examine his emergence as Hungary's quasi-honorary consul. In the 1920s, filling the void created by the collapse of the empire, Komor obtained prestige and reputation by providing much-needed POW and refugee relief. In an era when humanitarian concern was growing and professionals in the field were rare, he provided a permanent humanitarian patronage system for needy Hungarian compatriots. However, despite his service and the community's lobbying, his official consular appointment was never realized. The decades-long struggle tells a great deal about Hungary's diplomatic failure, waning interest in its overseas migrant community, and rising antisemitism, as well as the dynamics of the Shanghai Hungarian community. Looking at Komor's decades-long working relations with the Dutch consular services and his liaising with the Budapest Hungarian diaspora organization "Permanent Bureau of the World Federation of Hungarians" (Permanent Bureau for short)⁴³ allows us to see the environment that yielded a reliable humanitarian patronage system for needy compatriots.

Komor's thirty years of serving China's Hungarian and Jewish communities started with the Hungarian Red Cross (HRC) POW Repatriation Mission in 1920–22. Having returned from his British-imposed, almost-yearlong European exile, Komor picked up his father's wartime humanitarian efforts by identifying Hungarian repatriates in China for the Vladivostok-based initiative. Co-funded by various charity organizations, the HRC mission assembled and assisted the embarkation of soldiers of various nationalities who came from the Siberian POW camps of post-Civil War Russia.⁴⁴ To enable former Hungarian POWs to reach the adjacent Manchurian provinces, its crew cooperated with the consular representatives of the Netherlands, a neutral country serving Hungarian interests in China from Beijing's 1917 declaration of war on Austria-Hungary until its 1940 occupation by Nazi Germany.⁴⁵ Good intentions and diplomatic influence notwithstanding, the Dutch couldn't deal with undocumented Magyar-speaking applicants seeking repatriation. Multilingual and locally available, Paul Komor volunteered to identify and vouch for hundreds of former POWs who claimed to be Hungarian citizens but lacked the necessary documents to prove it.⁴⁶ The reputation and visibility Komor obtained by being at the center of the repatriation efforts naturally prompted the newly forming Hungarian diaspora to regard him as their informal leader.

The "uncrowned king"⁴⁷ of the Shanghai Hungarians looked after a small but complex realm that included missionaries, well-off and destitute ex-POWs, expatriate businessmen, and professionals—the pride and the underbelly of foreign Shanghai. By the late 1930s, the population of ethnic Hungarians would reach around seven hundred souls,⁴⁸ making it Republican China's second-largest foreign community without direct consular representation.⁴⁹ In the early 1920s, their number fluctuated around two hundred, mostly former refugee POWs who settled in China after the war, divided roughly equally

⁴³Founded in 1929, the Permanent Bureau of the World Congress of Hungarians (*Magyarok Világkongresszusa Állandó Szervezeti Irodája*) was a quasi-governmental initiative of the Horthy regime targeting the Hungarian overseas diaspora. See more in notes 61 and 76.

⁴⁴Many American organizations supported the HRC Mission, which—like their German, Austrian, and other sister task forces—repatriated their POWs from Siberia. For a first-hand account of the mission's leader, see Géza Dell'Adami and Jenő Saáry, *Megváltás Szibériából [Redemption from Siberia]* (Budapest, 1925).

⁴⁵In 1917, the Netherlands took over Austria-Hungary's representation of interest in China and continued to assist both Austrians and Hungarians after the postwar dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. After Austria secured a trade agreement with China and set up its own consular network in 1926, the Dutch continued to serve only Hungarians.

⁴⁶Komor, "To the Dutch Consulate General in Shanghai Re: Confirmation of Andor Koch's Hungarian Nationality," 16 June 1920, MNL, OL, K672, 1.cs.

⁴⁷Tibold Kregczy, "To Mrs. Ákos née Dalma Báthory Re: Shanghai Hungarians and Paul Komor," 18 November 1934, MNL, OL, P975, 1-22, 1-3, 1018/935.

⁴⁸The aggregated number of Hungarian individuals on name lists and in personal files is 484. An additional 100 missionaries and minimum 150 non-citizens should be added. Based on the records of the Shanghai Consulate General and Beijing Legation of the Netherlands, as well as the Tokyo Royal Hungarian Legation, in Hungarian National Archives (MNL), Foreign Ministry archives, K672 and K103.

⁴⁹The largest foreign community without direct consular representation were Chinese-registered stateless "White" Russians, refugees of the Bolshevik Revolution and Russian Civil War.

between the areas around Harbin in the north and Shanghai in the south.⁵⁰ Catholic and Protestant missionaries typically lived in the isolated rural hinterland and were only loosely connected with the Hungarian community. Some arrived with international missionary societies and had little contact with their urban compatriots. However, the majority of missionaries (more than one hundred men and women) belonged to one of the two independent Hungarian endeavors: the Society of Jesus in the northern Hebei and the Franciscans in the southern Hunan provinces.⁵¹ From the late 1920s, Jesuits bound for the countryside disembarked in the Shanghai harbor, where they received their first training in Mandarin. Some stayed for years as teachers at their suburban center in Zikawei (*Xujiahui*), where they could participate in the patriotic events of the Hungarian diaspora. Ex-POWs, whose careers were often put on track by the Komors, comprised the core of Shanghai's lay community between the wars. Architects, physicians, entrepreneurs, an actor, a mountaineer-turned soda-factory founder, a classical violinist, and a photographer who claimed to have served in the 1920s as the White Russian Supreme Leader Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak's minister⁵² were among those turning the corner in their lives. While all had adventurous pasts, ambition and fortune propelled only a few to a glittery future. For the most part, these few dozen Hungarian men and their typically Russian-speaking spouses struggled to find existential stability in their new home. For instance, painter and sculptor Kálmán Tatz, after working for Manchuria's warlord,⁵³ wandered south along the coastline with his young family until he passed away in 1931 from tuberculosis. His artist wife died soon afterward, leaving three orphans in wartime Hong Kong.⁵⁴ His brother, the painter László Tatz, had some illustrious commissions and a successful art academy in the late 1920s but remained a financial drain on the Hungarian community for over a decade.⁵⁵ Struggling to find steady employment, the Roma musician István Holdosi's temporary gigs in musical bands forced him to rely on communal support until his death,⁵⁶ while scenographer George Koppány, a promising soccer goalkeeper in prewar Budapest⁵⁷ who worked for amateur theatrical productions in the Shanghai post-Habsburg community, engaged in shady business and spent time in jail.⁵⁸ Komor relied on the community's charitable elite to provide for such destitute members.

Key figures of the post-Habsburg migrant community's self-organization and the Shanghai philanthropic scene were the Renners: a physician to the wealthy Baghdadi Sassoon family, and his cultural

⁵⁰In 1932, The Harbin Dutch Consul estimated the local Hungarian population between 100 and 200. L. van der Hoeven, "Harbin Dutch Consul to Dutch Consulate General in Shanghai (Transcript for the Beijing Dutch Legation)," 27 December 1932, MNL, OL, K672, 3.cs, No. 132.

⁵¹Péter Vámos, "Hungarian Missionaries in China," in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, eds. Stephen J. Uhalley and Xiaoxin Wu (Armonk, NY, 2000), 217–32 and Máttyás Mervay, "Review of Péter Vámos, 'Imáitokba Ajánljuk Magunkat' A Magyar Jezsuiták Levelei Kínából, 1923–1954 ['We Commend Ourselves in Your Prayers': The Letters of the Hungarian Jesuits from China, 1923–1954]," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 179 (2021): 207–10.

⁵²Shanghai photographer and painter E.A. von Kobza (1890?–1944?) moved to Hong Kong and rescued the precious Chater Collection during the Japanese occupation. Máttyás Mervay, "Magyar Művészek Kínában – Kutatás Hongkongban És Sanghajban [Hungarian Artists in China: A Research Conducted in Hong Kong and Shanghai]," *Irodalmi Jelen*, 17 July 2017, <https://www.irodalmijelen.hu/2017-jul-17-0705/mervay-matyas-magyar-muveszek-kinaban-kutatas-hongkongban-sanghajban>.

⁵³"Kálmán Tatz and his bronze bust of Zhang Zuolin," photo, ca. 1925, Robert Tatz's Private Collection, Edmonton AB, Canada.

⁵⁴Kálmán Tatz (1893–1931) and Antonina Shangin (1904–39) fled from Civil War Russia. Despite the efforts of Paul Komor's Hong Kong-based uncle, Siegfried Komor, to raise funds to repatriate the family to Europe, the unemployed and sick Tatz never made it to the ship and died in Kowloon. Mervay, "Magyar Művészek Kínában."

⁵⁵László Tatz (1888–1951) went to Guangzhou, where the city commissioned him to paint a portrait of the revolutionary Sun Yat-sen. In the 1930s, Tatz ran his own art academy in Hong Kong, then the "Gallery of Asian Beauty" in Shanghai. Mervay, "Magyar Művészek Kínában."

⁵⁶Komor unsuccessfully tried to obtain the Hungarian authorities' support for Holdosi's repatriation. Komor, "To Groenman Dutch CG in Shanghai Re: Case of Repatriation of Unemployed Hungarian Holdosi (Copy)," 9 March 1933, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 112.

⁵⁷Tamás Hegyi, "Futballkapus a fronton – Sanghajban kötött ki Zsák Károly tartalékja [Soccer Goalkeeper on the Front – Károly Zsák's Sub Ended Up in Shanghai]," *Nemzeti Sport Online*, 26 December 2019.

⁵⁸"German Theatrical Society: 'Lilium' at the Olympic Theatre," *NCDN*, 21 March 1925; SMP D.S. Pitts, "Police Report; G.L. Applicant for Certificate of Character," 28 June 1939, NARA via BiNuAs, Records of the CIA, Records of the SMP, RG263_M1750., No. 46, 1510–1512.

organizer wife.⁵⁹ Alexander (Sándor) Renner (1884–1967), a Budapest-born senior physician in the reserve, had enlisted in the K. u. K. Army, been captured on the eastern front, and interned in a Siberian POW camp. In 1920, he arrived in Shanghai, where, on Paul Komor's introduction, a German-trained Chinese doctor shared patients with him, enabling the establishment of his own practice.⁶⁰ In 1921, during his first visit back to Hungary, Dr. Renner registered with a Budapest-based diaspora organization's Shanghai representative.⁶¹ The so-called Doctors' Case, where he and other former enemy, so-called non-treaty national Austrian and Hungarian colleagues were denied employment at local hospitals, sheds light on his motivations and advocacy for Paul Komor's consular appointment. Although, in 1925, with the Dutch consul general's vouching for their credentials, Renner and his fellows were admitted to the municipal hospitals, the case propelled controversy about the community's consular representation, ultimately resulting in Komor's nomination for Hungarian honorary consul.⁶²

Jewish refugee memoirs and the official narratives of current Hungarian cultural diplomacy are often wrong about Paul Komor's "job title."⁶³ Given the confusing source material, their misunderstanding is understandable, but the perpetuation of this incorrect archontology needs to be checked. Between 1920 and 1940, the Shanghai Hungarian community called its leader, Paul Komor, various names, including "doyen," "dean," and "uncrowned king,"⁶⁴ but the moniker that stuck was "consul," even though the founder of the wartime International Committee never actually assumed such position. By briefly reconstructing the history of Komor's "consuldom," we not only gain insight into decades-long governmental back and forth and communal lobbying but also understand how his philanthropic legacy in the Shanghai Hungarian and Jewish communities came about.

In 1923, Komor's assistance during the earlier POW Repatriation Mission earned him the Dutch recommendation as Hungarian honorary consul, and the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) promoted Komor's recognition in Beijing through the Netherlands' Diplomatic Service.⁶⁵ The Chinese government, however, tied its exequatur until equal diplomatic relations were established by a bilateral treaty about which Budapest never seemed to care enough

⁵⁹Renner treated the Sassoons ("To Many Friends of Mr. D. E. Sassoon Will Be Glad to Learn That He Has Recovered ...," *IM*, 5 April 1929, 60). His wife, Theresia Moll (b. Terézia Grünfeld, 1892–1997), had trained as an artist before joining her husband in Shanghai, where she created a pan-Danubian cultural space for the Austrian, Czechoslovakian, and Hungarian communities to converge in an otherwise unthinkable transnational cooperation. For more on her cultural propaganda activities see Mátyás Mervay, "Toward a History of Interwar Sino-Hungarian Cultural Relations: Three Advocates of Kuomintang Soft Power, Hungarian Irredentism and Pan-Danubianism," *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 15 (2022): 77–93. The couple's altruism and self-interest involved them early on with Jewish ("Mr. Alex. Renner Has Been Invited by the Committee ...," *IM*, 8 January 1926, 16) and Hungarian charities.

⁶⁰"A magyar orvos, aki Sanghaiban O'Neilt kezelte, Budapesten beszél kínai prakszisáról [The Hungarian Physician Who Treated O'Neil In Shanghai Now Talks About His Chinese Praxis in Budapest]," *Pesti Napló*, 5 December 1930, 8; G.P., "Magyar orvos karrierje Kínában [Hungarian Physician's Career in China]," *Az Est*, 18 August 1921, 4.

⁶¹Founded in 1920, the League of Hungarians Abroad (*Külföldi Magyarok Szövetsége*) was the predecessor of the overseas diaspora organization Permanent Bureau. "A 'Külföldi Magyarok Szövetségének' képviselői külföldön [The Representatives of the 'League of Hungarians Abroad']," *Határszéli Újság*, 21 May 1922, 2; "Magyar orvos szervező munkája Kínában [Hungarian Physician's Organizing Work in China]," *Budapesti Orvosi Újság*, 17 November 1921, 734.

⁶²"Minutes of the Seventh Consular Body Meeting," 1922, BNA FO, FO 671/444; "Municipal Hospitals Admission of Hungarian, Austrian and German Doctors to Attend Patients (1922–1926)," 1926, SMA, U1-3-3007; "William Daniels, Acting Consul-General for the Netherlands to Dr. C.N. Davis, Acting Commissioner of Public Health, SMC Re: Austrian and Hungarian Doctors Admission to Municipal Hospitals," 22 May 1922, MNL, OL, K672, 1.cs.

⁶³Eber, *Jewish Refugees in Shanghai*, 77; Hoss, "Der lange Arm des Deutschen Reiches," 182; "Paul Komor Biography," USHMM; The Shanghai Hungarian Consulate General, "Sanghaj múltja és jelene [Shanghai's Past and Present]," accessed on 5 October 2021, <https://sanghaj.mfa.gov.hu/page/sanghaj>.

⁶⁴G.W. Boissevain, Dutch Consul General in Shanghai, "To Paul Komor," 4 April 1941, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 1449/H.5; "SMP D.S. Tcheremshanky's Police Report on Paul Komor," 30 May 1933, NARA via BiNuAs, Records of the CIA, Records of the SMP, RG263_M1750-45, 46, 47, No. 15, 566.

⁶⁵F. Ambró, Chargé d'Affaires in The Hague, "To G. Daruváry, Hungarian MFA, Re: Magyar állampolgárok Chinával szemben lévő követeléseinek felszabadítása [The Liberation of Hungarian Nationals' Demands Against China]," 28 October 1923, MNL, OL, K[unknown], Hungarian Legation in The Hague; "Envoy P. L. Ambrózy of Hun. MFA, Budapest to F. Ambró, Chargé d'Affaires in The Hague," 19 December 1923, MNL, OL, K[unknown], Hungarian Legation in The Hague, No. 19410/1b.

to sign.⁶⁶ The communal petition spearheaded by Dr. Renner was also rejected, indicating Beijing's steadfastness.⁶⁷ Although sources indicate that throughout the 1920s, the aspiring Komor was using the consular title,⁶⁸ after the MFA's halfhearted follow-ups,⁶⁹ in 1926, citing his declining health as a pretext, he finally abandoned his efforts. He didn't change his mind when, years later, in a repeated upswing of the MFA's China diplomacy, the Dutch consul general approached him again.⁷⁰ He called an honorary consul "a poor relation" of the career consul who is unable to handle political considerations. Komor also thought that the Dutch, who still enjoyed extraterritoriality and had a decade-long experience with the community, were better equipped to represent Hungarian interests. As "neutral outsiders," Komor reasoned, the Dutch could avoid taking sides in the Hungarian diaspora's interne-cine bickering.⁷¹

While the truth about Komor's failed appointment lay in the lack of Sino-Hungarian diplomatic relations, early 1930s antisemitic tabloids in Budapest falsely suggested another motive, which by the end-of-the-decade surge of anti-Jewish legislation, unexpectedly ended up making sense. In 1933, the popular right-wing daily *Pesti Futár* claimed that Komor's religion made him "unsuitable" for the honorary consul position.⁷² The news was not credible, not only because Komor had converted to Lutheranism a decade earlier but also because it wasn't the Chinese who cared about his faith. The fact that the Hungarian government didn't care to appoint anyone else in China until the Japanese takeover⁷³ also proves the argument of diplomatic indifference and Hungarian priority given to Tokyo over the subsequent Chinese governments.⁷⁴ However, sadly, the *Pesti Futár* did have a

⁶⁶W.J. Oudendijk, "To MFA of The Netherlands in The Hague," 27 May 1924, MNL, OL, K[unknown], Hungarian Legation in The Hague, No. 893/161. As the author argues in his dissertation "Habsburg Refugees in China: Postimperial Diaspora, Diplomacy, and Orientalism in the Republican Era (1918–1949)" (PhD diss., New York University, 2024), economic and foreign policy reasons are to be blamed for interwar Hungary's underdeveloped relations with China (compared to its post-Habsburg peers of Czechoslovakia and Austria). On the one hand, the fundamentally agrarian country had little to offer to the Chinese market. On the other hand, the domestic irredentist climate in which Hungarian foreign policy's justifiable yet deeply provincial focus on its immediate neighbors prevented it from accomplishing anything substantial with a country geographically so distant. Budapest's steady sliding into the arms of the revisionist Axis powers, ending up in WWII on China's archenemy's side as a Japanese ally, was only the final straw. Besides the regionally unique wartime connections with collaborationist regimes, Sino-Hungarian bilateral relations were postponed until the USSR's global communist alliance in 1949.

⁶⁷"Shanghai Hungarians' Petition to Dutch Consul General in Shanghai Re: Lobbying for Paul Komor's Consular Exequatur at Chinese Government," 15 January 1925, NL-HaNA, BuZa/Gezantschap China, 2.05.90, No. 653; MNL, OL, K672, 1.cs., No. 306.

⁶⁸In the 1920s, he displayed the sign "Consul" on his office door. Ferenc Fonyó, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau, Re: Paul Komor and the Shanghai Hungarians," 8 October 1935, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, 2287/935. He signed a 1925 letter as "Royal Hungarian Consul" to an ex-POW in Manchuria. János Kovrig, "Manchouli száműzött magyarjai között [Among the Exiled Hungarians of Manchouli]," *Magyarság*, 11 June 1933, 11–12. He used a letterhead, if already crossed out in 1930, that read "Royal Hungarian Consulate." Komor, "To Permanent Bureau, Re: ex-POW Mongolian Duke Gyula Farkas," 13 November 1930, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 26 [1251/930]; and he validated his wife's 1925 transit visa to Europe as "*Le Consul Royale pour la Hongrie a Shanghai*," with an English-Hungarian bilingual seal of his claimed office. Adèle Komor's Transit Visa, 1925; Valerie Komor's Komor Family Papers, 1885–2012, B1/F24.

⁶⁹"Envoy P. L. Ambrózy of Hun. MFA, Budapest to Chargé d'Affaires, The Hague," 19 January 1925, MNL, OL, K [UNKNOWN], Hungarian Legation in The Hague, No. 495/1.

⁷⁰"Kánya Kálmán berlini követ meghatalmazása a Kínával kötendő barátsági és kereskedelmi szerződés iránti tárgyalások felvételére és a létesítendő szerződés aláírására [Ambassador to Berlin Kálmán Kánya's Authorization to Negotiate and Sign a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with China]," 10 May 1929, MNL, OL, W12, K27.

⁷¹Komor, "To F.E.H. Groenman, Dutch CG, Shanghai," 12 November 1929, NL-HaNA, BuZa/Gezantschap China, 2.05.90, No. 653.

⁷²Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau, Re: Distorted Facts about Paul Komor's Consular Appointment in Hungarian Press," 7 March 1933, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 113.

⁷³With the 1942 appointment and 1943 accreditation of László Hudec as Royal Hungarian Honorary Consul in Shanghai to Wang Jingwei's Japanese puppet regime, Hungarian citizens would have direct consular representation in China for two years. In 1945, when the Japanese authorities ordered the dissolution of the consulate, the Shanghai Hungarian Association took over their protection.

⁷⁴Unlike Austria and Czechoslovakia, the interwar Hungarian MFA could not work out an equal treaty agreement with the subsequent Beijing and Nanjing governments. Attempts were made between 1924 and 1926 to follow Austria's example and conclude a treaty of commerce and friendship and to settle the issue of protecting Hungarian nationals. The Chinese side argued that since Hungary didn't take steps to conclude a commercial treaty with China, it could not adopt the same attitude vis-à-vis Hungary that it had taken with Austria.

point. With Komor's baptism, he might have become a "true Christian," but since the racial definition of Jews in the 1920 Numerus Clausus law,⁷⁵ he was not fit to be a "true Hungarian" anymore.

The Interwar Politics of a Hungarian Shanghailander

Understanding Komor's relation to his native country is crucial to fully grasp the trajectory from Hungarian community assistance to the Jewish refugee relief efforts. Political views and socialization played a role in this by no means trouble-free relationship. He was a monarchist citizen of a kingless country, a liberal in an illiberal world, a patriot outside of his native land, a cosmopolitan constantly defending his motherland, and an antifascist who supported the revision of the post-WWI peace treaties. Drawing on his letters to the director of the Budapest Hungarian diaspora organization "Permanent Bureau,"⁷⁶ a local missionary friend, and Shanghai editors, this section walks the reader through Paul Komor's position on some of the most important political arguments of his time. As an emerging public personality, Komor found himself as a man of standing explaining the post-Habsburg region to an international audience. From the 1930s, Komor engaged in public debates with the Czechoslovak representatives in Shanghai's English-speaking press, challenging what he saw as mainstream "Entente propaganda." By intending to speak the marginalized voice of a Hungarian, he undertook the mission of an interpreter and commentator of East-Central European politics for his local East Asian expatriate community.

As a self-described monarchist and "convinced legitimist"⁷⁷—a supporter of the rehabilitation of the Habsburg dynasty—Komor was an old-fashioned man of the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire and not an ideal match for the interwar kingless kingdom of Regent Miklós Horthy. In his 1930 Shanghai Rotary Club address describing Hungary's postwar turbulence, he chastised the revolutionary social-democratic and communist governments for causing a "sad interregnum," describing Horthy's regime as merely "picking up . . . threads of the fallen monarchical form." He also reminded his audience that the Habsburg heir might live in exile "but not by any will of the Hungarian people."⁷⁸ The nostalgia for an idealized and never-really-lived homeland often shows up in his correspondence, where Hungarian politicians are compared with iconic nineteenth-century statesmen. Gyula Károlyi, the resigned Great Depression-era Prime Minister, resembled only in appearance "the great and unforgettable" Count István Tisza,⁷⁹ the epitome of the monarchy's so-called "liberal-conservative consent." However, in Komor's opinion, the right-wing radical Gyula Gömbös had some "freshness and a glow in his views," as well as the "energy and a will to do and act" that had been missing since the death of Count Tisza.⁸⁰ Indeed, the Gömbös Cabinet (1932–36) fought against economic stagnation and broke Hungary out of its postwar international isolation. However, much to his future detriment, Komor

⁷⁵This policy (1920/XXV), often seen as the first anti-Jewish act in twentieth-century Europe, introduced a quota system against minority groups in Hungarian higher education, where students of Jewish origins were overrepresented. It defined Jews as a race (*nép faj*), as opposed to a confession, but only included those who converted to Christianity after 1 August 1919. Andor Ladányi, "On the 1928 Amendment to the Hungarian Numerus Clausus Act," in *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*, eds. Viktor Karády and Péter Tibor Nagy (Budapest: 2012), 69–111, 71.

⁷⁶The Permanent Bureau of the World Congress of Hungarians was led by director Károly Nagy JUDr., a retired Budapest police chief, with whom Komor kept up a decade-long correspondence. In 1938, the organization transformed into the World Federation of Hungarians (*Magyarok Világszövetsége*) that continues to operate today. Dániel Gazsó, "A Magyar Diaszpóra Intézményesülésének És Anyaországi Viszonyainak Története [The History of the Institutionalization of the Hungarian Diaspora]," in *Amerikai Magyarok – Magyar Amerikaiak. Új irányok a közös történelem kutatásában* [American Hungarians – Hungarian Americans. New directions in the study of common history], eds. László Ambrus and Eszter Rakita (Eger, 2019), 15–33.

⁷⁷Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Lázár Ehrenthal, a stateless Hungarian's case, analogy with Hudec," 16 December 1931. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 103.

⁷⁸Komor, "Hungary of To-Day," *The Pagoda – Shanghai Rotary Club*, 25 September 1930, 2–4.; the report of the *Pester Lloyd*, "Ein Vortrag über Ungarn in Schanghai," *Pester Lloyd*, 25 October 1932, evening edition.

⁷⁹Komor, "To Károly Nagy of Permanent Bureau," 14 November 1932. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 103.

⁸⁰Komor, "To Károly Nagy of Permanent Bureau Re: Program Speech of PM Gyula Gömbös," 14 November 1932. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 152.

didn't foresee how this Fascist-leaning government would push Hungary toward the far-right authoritarian regimes of Italy and Germany.

From 1936 on, anti-Jewish policy measures evoked Komor's criticism. Reading foreign newspapers' reporting on antisemitic atrocities in Hungarian universities,⁸¹ he warned that "if we want to go back to the times of 'Erger Berger' [antisemitic catcalls], we shouldn't be surprised to be evaluated [by the international community] accordingly."⁸² In a letter to a Jesuit missionary friend, Komor expressed scepticism about Hungarian pro-governmental press reports that deflected responsibility from prominent Catholic and right-wing fraternities and blamed antisemitic bullying on "irresponsible elements" and even the Little Entente (i.e., Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia).⁸³ While Komor often raised his voice against what he perceived as anti-Hungarian bias and the Havas and Reuters news agencies' use of "malicious Czech sources,"⁸⁴ when it came to antisemitic legislation, he knew who was responsible for his country's bad press. Embittered, he wrote to the director of the Permanent Bureau that the 1938 First Anti-Jewish Law,⁸⁵ which excluded Jews in Hungary from certain professions, didn't come from the "witch kitchen of the Little Entente"⁸⁶ and contrasted the "political half-wits, loudmouths, and demagogues" of the center-right Darányi Cabinet (1936–38)⁸⁷ with politicians and public intellectuals of the "glorious" Reform and Dualist Eras. "Were they alive," wrote Komor, "they would protect me from the new laws."⁸⁸ Hungary's gradual but steady adoption of antisemitic legislation, signposted by the four anti-Jewish Laws and numerous measures between 1938 and 1942, directly influenced Paul Komor's life and activities in China. As will be shown, the discriminatory policies not only turned his Jewish compatriots away from supporting Komor's charity fund but also called his own citizenship into doubt.

Pro-Fascist foreign policy also sparked Komor's criticism. Aiming to break out of its postwar isolation from the anti-revisionist states of the Little Entente, Hungary's governments sought Mussolini's Italy for support starting in the 1920s. Even Komor's favorite conservative politician of the era, the pragmatic Prime Minister István Bethlen, searched for the opportunity and signed the 1927 Italian-Hungarian Treaty of Amity. This policy of Bethlen, to Komor the "great patriot and statesman in the spirit of the great liberals,"⁸⁹ was continued by the Gömbös Cabinet, resulting in the 1934 Rome Protocols.⁹⁰ However, Komor wasn't convinced and repeatedly expressed his aversion to Hungary's

⁸¹"Anti-Jewish Excesses in Hungary Continue," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 28 October 1927, 1; "Britain Urged To Allow Jews In Palestine: Hungarian Students Are Agitating Against Jewish Press," *The China Press*, 26 January 1938, 7.

⁸²Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Antisemitism in Hungary," 17 November 1936. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 654.

⁸³Komor, "To Kékessy SJ, Shanghai Re: Hungarian Politics; Italian Friendship," 3 December 1936. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 661. Such fraternities included the *Foederatio Americana* and *Turul*. On interwar academic antisemitism in Hungary and the role of right-wing student associations, see Róbert Kerepeszki, "The Racial Defense in Practice: The Activity of the Turul Association at Hungarian Universities Between the Two World Wars," in *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary*, eds. Karády and Nagy, 136–50.

⁸⁴Komor, "To Permanent Bureau Re: Improving Permanent Bureau's Services for Hungarians Coming to China," 12 January 1934. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 265.

⁸⁵Between 1938 and 1941, the Hungarian government passed racial laws reversing the equal citizenship status granted to Jews in Hungary in 1867. The laws defined "Jews" in so-called racial terms, forbade intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and excluded Jews from full participation in various professions.

⁸⁶Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Jewish Law and Bad reputation of Hungary; Harbin and Mihaly cases; tourism propaganda, Mrs. Renner," 1 July 1938. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 816/95.

⁸⁷Historian and Darányi-specialist Róbert Kerepeszki characterized Darányi as a "consensual figure" and his appointment as a compromise between the radical right represented by the recently deceased former PM Gömbös and Bethlen's conservatives. Róbert Kerepeszki, *Darányi Kálmán: pályakép, személyiség, korrajz* [*Kálmán Darányi: His Career, Personality, and Era*] (Pécs, 2018), 104.

⁸⁸Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Jewish Law; Komor's status; political demagogues," 19 May 1938. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 805/91.

⁸⁹Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Shanghai Hungarians' reaction to PM Bethlen's Speech," 25 April 1938. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 796/88.

⁹⁰A diplomatic document registered by the League of Nations, the Protocols united the fascist and fascist-leaning leaders of Austria, Italy, and Hungary against the Little Entente and the looming rise of Nazi Germany. Petra Hamerli, "A magyar-olasz kapcsolatok regionális hatásai 1927 és 1936 között [The Hungarian-Italian Relations in A Regional Context Between 1927 and

pro-Italian policy. “A traitor is a traitor,” and a “break-promise” does not care about breaking his vow again,⁹¹ he wrote, referring to Italy’s switching its allies in World War I, a contention shared across the former Habsburg Empire. Writing to his Jesuit friend, he blamed Italians as “the reasons of our misfortune,” i.e., the lost war and the Trianon Treaty. Re-naming Budapest’s iconic junction Oktogon to “Mussolini Square” in 1936 was “cheap and childish,” even though Komor admitted that Mussolini might have done much for Italy.⁹²

While loudly objecting to Hungary’s discriminatory domestic and pro-Fascist foreign policies, Komor openly voiced his support of irredentism in the Shanghai media. “Revisionism,” interwar Hungary’s leading political discourse that made the re-negotiation of the Peace Treaty of Trianon every government’s paramount diplomatic objective, made Komor “pray” in 1932 that the hawkish PM Gömbös and his new regime would bring the “complete rehabilitation [sic] of our historic frontiers.”⁹³ But Komor didn’t stop at praying. An active consumer of global, local, and especially Hungarian media products, Komor was well-equipped to engage in Shanghai’s public discussions, where his expertise on Central Europe was recognized.⁹⁴ Two decades after his youthful laments to the editors about tardy trams and a declining musical scene,⁹⁵ Komor’s letters to coastal China’s most esteemed paper, the *North China Daily News* (NCDN), took a patriotic turn.⁹⁶ Anglophile Komor’s ardent support for the “Justice for Hungary!” movement made him also cherish its British inspirator, Lord Rothermere. The newspaper magnate was hailed by much of the interwar Hungarian public as an international standard bearer for the “revision” after his 1927 front-page editorial in his conservative *Daily Mail* singled out Trianon as the worst of the Versailles settlements.⁹⁷ In 1936, Komor demanded the correction of an Havas Agency-supplied news item that questioned Rothermere’s impartiality based on his alleged Hungarian business interests,⁹⁸ and in 1940, Komor regretted the NCDN’s omitting the deceased Lord’s “Justice for Hungary” campaign in Rothermere’s obituary.⁹⁹

Komor’s zealous irredentism naturally placed him in opposition to the leading anti-revisionist successor state, Czechoslovakia. In 1934, holding his opponents to account, Komor defended a leading pro-Hungarian Slovak politician and priest in Czechoslovakia, responding to anonymous attacks on calling for a plebiscite in ethnically mixed areas.¹⁰⁰ By questioning his opponent’s genuine commitment to the principles of national self-determination, Komor echoed his government’s official

1936],” *Közép-Európai Közlemények* 11, no. 4 (2018): 9–34.; Petra Hamerli, *Magyar-olasz diplomáciai kapcsolatok és regionális hatásaik (1927–1934)* [Hungarian-Italian Diplomatic Relations and Their Regional Repercussions (1927–1934)] (Budapest, 2019).

⁹¹Komor, “To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Komor Family’s Hungarian Feelings, Anti-Italian Sentiments, Kékessy’s Letter,” 1 December 1936. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 659/47.

⁹²Komor, “To Kékessy SJ, Shanghai(?),” 27 December 1936. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 672.

⁹³Komor, “To Károly Nagy of Permanent Bureau Re: Program Speech of PM Gyula Gömbös,” 14 November 1932. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 152.

⁹⁴*Shanghai Times* editor Alfred Morley, a fellow Rotarian, called Komor “well versed ... in the Central European situation and the role of Hungary therein.” Alfred Morley, “To Paul Komor Re: Appreciating Komor’s Expertise on Central European Issues,” 26 April 1938. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 601.

⁹⁵Komor, “To the Editor.” *NCDN*. 10 June 1911; Komor, “Letter to the Editor,” *NCDN*. 3 January 1914.

⁹⁶Mervay, “Toward a History of Interwar Sino-Hungarian Cultural Relations,” 81.

⁹⁷Harold S. Harmsworth, First Viscount Rothermere (1868–1940). For his own account of revisionist activity, see Viscount Rothermere, *My Campaign for Hungary* (London, 1939). For academic inquiries, see Matthew Caples, “Et in Hungaria ego: Trianon, Revisionism and the Journal *Magyar Szemle* (1927–1944),” *Hungarian Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 51–104; and Ignác Romsics, “‘Magyarország helye a nap alatt.’ Lord Rothermere és a magyar revízió [‘Hungary’s Place Under the Sun.’ Lord Rothermere and the Hungarian Revisionism],” in Ignác Romsics, *Múltról a máának* [About the Past For the Present] (Budapest, 2004), 249–63.

⁹⁸Komor, “To E. Haward, editor of *NCDN* Re: Misinformation about Rothermere and Hungarian Newspapers,” 24 April 1936. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 587.

⁹⁹Komor, “To Editor of *NCDN* Re: In Lord Rothermere’s Necrology,” 28 November 1940. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. [unknown].

¹⁰⁰It’s safe to speculate that the piece was written by someone around the Czechoslovak consular corps, which was undergoing internal conflicts at the time. Shanghai Czechoslovak Consul Augustin Lafar (1930–34) left China after an unresolved conflict with his colleague Envoy Rudolf Feitscher (1931–37) that emerged from the rivalry between the Consulate and the Legation. The Lafar-founded Czechoslovak Association in China (*Československé sdružení v Číně*) dissolved soon after his departure.

Wilsonian policy.¹⁰¹ He also shared the postwar disappointment of the Hungarian elite and society in the Western Allies' selective application of the US president's famous principles. In his mind, it was either ignorance or merely a double standard. In letters to the editor, Komor called the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy "the height of historical, geographical, and ethnographical stupidity"¹⁰² and labelled Wilson "a philosopher" and a "simple-minded soul." Citing the examples of South Tyrolean and Upper Silesian Germans, Carpathian Slovaks, and the case of Northern Ireland, Komor exposed national self-determination as a "bogus excuse" to enforce great and small power agendas. With scathing irony, he related distant boundary disputes for his Shanghai readers, comparing them to more familiar East Asian power politics.¹⁰³

The 1941 suicide of Komor's admired conservative PM Pál Teleki tragically embodied the realities of the West-sceptic reasoning of Hungarians that, while wanting to remain neutral, had to reckon with Germany as the only power that could help the return of the lost territories.¹⁰⁴ Komor knew the conundrum, what Hungarian historiography later called the "fixed course" (*kényszerpálya*), the predetermined path-dependency of a country that tied itself to the Axis in the hope of fulfilling its irredentist dreams.¹⁰⁵ In his 1940 letter, Komor explained to Shanghai's leading American radio station's newscaster¹⁰⁶ how the Trianon Treaty had forced Hungary "to seek political friends . . . where . . . she would not have sought them had the Allies had the least understanding of her problems."¹⁰⁷ The empathy he felt for his mutilated country, however, did not extend to the gradually dismembered Czechoslovakia. When in November 1938, Hitler and Mussolini, as mediators empowered by the Munich conferees, "awarded" Magyar-majority southern Slovakia to Hungary (First Vienna Award), and in mid-March 1939, the Führer allowed Budapest to annex the ethnically mostly Ruthenian Subcarpathia (aka Carpathian Ruthenia or Russinsko), Shanghai Hungarians shed tears of joy. To the NCDN editor, Komor defended the territorial changes, likening Vienna to Versailles and Trianon.¹⁰⁸ He congratulated the Permanent Bureau's director in Budapest on "the reintegration of Russinsko"¹⁰⁹ and hoped to wire again soon for a similar occasion.¹¹⁰ The annual gathering of local Hungarians organized by Komor also reflected this jubilant mood. Listening to the mass of gratitude celebrated by missionary fathers offered a momentary sense of belonging; however, it didn't mask the complexities that characterized Komor's ambiguous relationship with distant Hungary.¹¹¹

Ivana Bakešová, *Legionári v roli diplomatů: československo-čínské vztahy 1918–1949* [*Legionnaires in the Role of Diplomats: Czechoslovak-Chinese Relations 1918–1949*] (Prague, 2013), 88.

¹⁰¹Komor, "The Slovaks: A Hungarian Rejoinder," *NCDN*, 21 February 1934, 293; the first article Komor responded to is unknown.

¹⁰²Komor, "To Editor of NCDN Re: Ignorant Allies in Versailles; Accusation of German Minority Suppressed in Hungary," 21 March 1939. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 903.

¹⁰³Junius Secundus (Paul Komor), "Peace and Its Foundations," *NCDN*, 9 February 1938.

¹⁰⁴On PM Pál Teleki, see Balázs Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki (1874–1941): The Life of a Controversial Hungarian Politician* (Boulder, CO, 2006).

¹⁰⁵Péter Hanák, "'Range' and 'Constraint.' Scope of Action and Fixed Course in György Ránki's Historical Approach," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 34, no. 4 (1988): 359–73.

¹⁰⁶See more on newscaster Carroll Alcott and the XMHA in Michael A. Krysko, "'Unofficial Radio Hell-Raiser': Radio News and US-Japanese Conflict on the Eve of the Pacific War," in *American Radio in China: International Encounters with Technology and Communications, 1919–41*, ed. Michael A. Krysko, Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (London, 2011), 154–87, 159.

¹⁰⁷Komor, "To the Editor Carroll Alcott of XMHA Radio Station Re: 'Undeserved Crack' Taken at Hungary," 1940 1938. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. Aunknown].

¹⁰⁸Komor, "To Editor of NCDN Re: Ignorant Allies in Versailles; Accusation of German Minority Suppressed in Hungary," 21 March 1939. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 903.

¹⁰⁹No one in the Komor-correspondence referred to Transcarpathia in its currently accepted Hungarian name, "Kárpátalja = Subcarpathia." See more on the region's various toponyms: Csilla Fedinec and Vehesh Mykola, eds. *Kárpátalja, 1919–2009: történelem, politika, kultúra* [*Transcarpathia, 1919–2009: History, Politics, Culture*] (Budapest, 2010), 15.

¹¹⁰Komor, "To Károly Nagy of Permanent Bureau Re: Return of Russinsko," 23 March 1939. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 905/119.

¹¹¹Komor, "To Imre Kékesy SJ, Re: thanks for beautiful Hungarian mass," 13 March 1939. MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 899.

Despite the ominous signs in the reshuffling of Central Europe in the late 1930s as well as his growing disapproval of the course Hungary's political leadership was taking, Komor strove to hold onto what he saw as his patriotic commitments. A letter published in 1938 written by prewar Czechoslovakia's last ambassador to China captures the contradictions of a Jewish Hungarian running a patriotic PR campaign in China for his country that constantly chipped away at his own rights. Envoy Jan Šeba¹¹² surely hit a nerve in Komor when advising him to stop his propaganda work in the Shanghai press. It was absurd for a "non-Aryan Hungarian," wrote Šeba, considering the treatment that his peers experienced at home, that Komor, in Shanghai, should act as the "standard bearer of the Hungarian cause." While recognizing that he was aware of "non-Aryan Hungarians" receiving second-class-treatment in their homeland, in his reply, Komor decided to bite the bullet and close ranks. The credo he summarized to the Czechoslovak ambassador reads almost like one of Joseph Roth's protagonists:

The country of Hungary is eternal, but the men who run the country now are only there temporarily. My loyalty belongs to the country, and if I can do something for the country, I also do a service to the people and among them also to the non-Aryan citizens.¹¹³

Though he seemed to have given a satisfying comeback, the pain of being finally rejected by the country to which he demonstrated such loyalty radiates through all his wartime correspondence, as seen in the following section. The contradictions that characterized Komor's relationship with Hungary were further highlighted in his serving as an informal leader of the Shanghai Hungarian community. With the beginning of WWII, a two-decade-long period of community-building and unabating pro-Hungarian stance ended.

Who Was a "Real" Hungarian in Interwar China?

Growing out of Komor's post-WWI assistance for refugee POWs in China, which had catapulted him to the top of the local Hungarian community, the aspiring honorary consul created the HRF in 1924. Once he gave up on being an appointed representative of Budapest, this self-aid organization became the center of Komor's communal activities for sixteen years. This way, despite the initial disappointment over his fruitless efforts, he could still quiet the doubts in his head; as the Czechoslovak envoy's 1938 letter asked, "What is your country doing for you?" Instead, Komor decided to focus on what *he* could do for his country. Building on his and his family's philanthropic experiences, he founded an expatriate charity fund that offered basic social assistance to many impoverished Hungarians.¹¹⁴ This section discusses the meaning of post-Habsburg national loyalties in a semi-colonial context, as well as the difficulties Komor encountered while administering the HRF.

Without support from the government, Komor's model was to rely on his community's generosity and the official framework provided by the Netherlands' Consular Service. Lacking direct Sino-Hungarian diplomatic relations since the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the Dutch consuls continued to liaise with the Hungarian MFA via their own in The Hague and with the local Chinese authorities. They gave weight to Komor's grant applications with their recommendations and occasionally advised him on decision-making. Meanwhile, Komor sought employment, housing, identification documents, loans, repatriation, and general interest representation for those in need. Because of Vienna's and Budapest's disagreement on dividing their liquidated common assets in China barred Hungarian citizens from receiving official financial assistance,¹¹⁵ Komor's work demanded fundraising. Despite his extensive social network in Shanghai, competing with a myriad of other charity causes for former

¹¹²An ex-Czechoslovak Legionnaire (also an ex-Austro-Hungarian POW) in the Russian Civil War, 1886-born Jan Šeba took over from Czechoslovak Envoy Robert Feitscher in 1937. His 1938 handover of the Legation to the occupying German authorities was widely criticized by his compatriots and prompted a postwar investigation. Bakešová, 96.

¹¹³Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Press-controversy with Czechoslovak Envoy Šeba in NCDN," 21 April 1938, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1-3, No. 793/86.

¹¹⁴Komor, "Statement of Account of the Hungarian Relief Fund 1925-1926," 28 May 1925, MNL, OL, K672, 1.cs., No. 1325.

¹¹⁵Groenman, "To A.W. Olsen, Secretary, Shanghai Race Club," No. 1499.

“enemy nationals” was a challenge. Unlike a decade later, during the wartime Jewish refugee crisis, when his International Committee was backed by a real-estate magnate, the HRF had to rely on individual benefactors and the corporate charity donations Komor could attract.

The HRF’s yearly statements—patchy records from the Hungarian National Archives—and contemporary newspaper ads and reports documented Mr. and Mrs. Komor’s lobbying at Shanghai’s major clubs and organizing charity events.¹¹⁶ These sources reveal that while smaller “special collections” covered emergency situations, e.g., the burial expenses of an impoverished member, the bulk of the money came from regular subscribers. About a third were larger corporate-backed charity funds, such as the British Shanghai Race Club and the French Concession’s Charity Fund, the symbols and pillar institutions of foreign presence in China.¹¹⁷ Two ethnic-Hungarian-owned corporations, formerly the largest Austro-Hungarian enterprise in Shanghai, Molnár & Greiner,¹¹⁸ and the smaller, Czechoslovak-owned G. Vajda & Co.¹¹⁹ contributed 8 percent of total donations. Individual benefactors, who offered more than half of all donations, were of different nationalities and held various middle-class professions. Most of them were ethnic Hungarians—both with or without a POW past—often carrying other countries’ passports, while there was a small minority of Chinese and other non-Hungarian donors too. Among ethnic Hungarians, corporate employees made up a third of all donations, the largest being Paul Komor’s, followed by bankers and general managers, such as Ernst Kelen’s (Molnár & Greiner) and Joseph Milch’s (China Fibre Container Co.¹²⁰). They were followed by a smaller group, about 15 percent of Hungarian ex-POWs, often previous aid recipients, like the physician Alexander Renner and the architect László Hudec.

Upon arriving in China, all Austro-Hungarian ex-POWs needed financial and legal assistance before some of them could become contributors. Given the immature consular service of the Habsburg successor states, the dozens of vulnerable men and their Russian refugee wives who didn’t make it to the repatriation ships were also left in an ethnonational no man’s land. Those who did not become sought-after professionals with stable jobs faced the hardships of unsteady income, childcare expenses, lodging fees, and a frail and undernourished body. The legal situation was especially challenging for those ethnic Hungarians, who, as Komor explained, *in absentia*, becoming citizens of Hungary’s neighboring states, lost their “proper rights” as Hungarian citizens.¹²¹ Throughout the 1920s, for the most part, Czechoslovak and Austrian nationals could turn to accredited, direct consular representation in China that ran their similar, HRF-like, “benevolent societies.”¹²² However, as Komor pointed out, Romanian and Yugoslav nationals in China, with no representatives, had nowhere to go.¹²³ Regardless of whether their new ruling governments had consuls in the Republic of China, Komor’s impression was that all ethnic Hungarians came to him first, asking for his help.

¹¹⁶“Hungarian Relief Fund Tea Held Yesterday,” *The China Press*, 1 December 1936, 4.

¹¹⁷Carter, *Champions Day*, 2020; Bickers, “Shanghaiers and Others,” 272.

¹¹⁸Founded in 1908 by the two Hungarian businessmen Béla Molnár and Béla Greiner, Molnár & Greiner Co. was an import-export company originally headquartered in Budapest, with branches in both Vienna and Shanghai since 1912. “Kinával és Japánnal való kiviteli kapcsolatok fejlesztése [Improving our Export Relations with China and Japan],” *Honi Ipar*, 1908, 20–21. During WWI, Shanghai Manager M. Kars hosted refugee soldiers, as reported in Ervin Bokor’s recollections, Bokor, 363. In 1925, the head office was listed in Vienna. *The Comacrib Directory of China 1925* (Shanghai, 1925), 282. In the 1920s, under general manager Ernst Kelen, its Shanghai branch became the largest branch of an Austrian company in Shanghai. Rudolf Agstner, “Personalverzeichnis,” in *Handbuch des Österreichischen Auswärtigen Dienstes. Band 1: 1918–1938* (Münster, 2015), 399.

¹¹⁹*The China Hong List 1939. A Business and Residential Directory of All Foreigners* (Shanghai, 1939), 281; “Czech Colony Here United in Organization,” *The China Press*, 7 July 1933, 16.

¹²⁰*The China Hong List 1939*, 59. Milch was well-embedded in Shanghai’s local Hungarian community. At his wife’s funeral, local Hungarian notables served as pallbearers and placed floral tributes in the name of “The Hungarian Community.” “Mrs. Mina M. Milch,” *IM*, 12 August 1938, 20.

¹²¹Komor, “To Groenman Re: Hungarians in the Successor States,” 19 July 1926, MNL, OL, K672,1.cs., No. 1863.

¹²²Among its post-Habsburg peers, Czechoslovakia had the longest diplomatic presence in Republican China, with ex-Czechoslovak Legionnaires having established a consular site in 1919 in Harbin; however, until the 1930 Sino-Czechoslovak Treaty, they were to call it and the Shanghai site “Delegate.” Bakešová, 24.

¹²³Actually, Yugoslavian nationals could, and did turn to the Czechoslovak authorities as their legal representatives at the latest from the 1930s. “Shanghai Gonggong Zujie Gongbujie Zongbanchu guanyu Jiekeshiluofake he Nansilafu zai Zhongguo de shetuan

Determining applicants' eligibility for relief based on their national status was another challenging task Komor often faced. Who constituted an eligible applicant for relief was left much to his discretion, where his considerations were guided by a very personal definition of a "Hungarian." While he declared that the HRF considered it its duty to aid "all Hungarians irrespective of their present citizenship," to verify a rightful claim he investigated the case of everyone who approached him for assistance. When in doubt, Komor would turn to the Dutch consular officials, and they would counsel him on how to proceed. His job was particularly tricky when he came across relief fraudsters, who, in their desperate situation, maximized their charity income by appealing to two sides. Komor's lenient approach prompted the Dutch consul general to advise him to exercise more caution, noting that help should be limited so that "all suspicions of abuse be removed." Such caution appeared to be justified when, in 1930, an application was submitted that raised suspicions of a scam.¹²⁴

The case of Franz Bürsöly showed how citizenship and ethnonational belonging could be opportunities to exploit in a postimperial multinational context. A Czechoslovak citizen of Hungarian ethnicity, Bürsöly tried to take advantage of the assistance of both communities' charity organizations. Despite being supported multiple times by the Czechoslovak Benevolent Society over the years, he denied receiving aid. In a letter to Komor, he described a desperate situation, claiming that he lost his job as a motor mechanic, his wife died in the hospital, and he stayed on the streets with his child. He claimed that the local Czechoslovak authorities refused to reissue his passport. After corresponding with the Czechoslovak delegate via the Dutch Consulate General, Komor learned that it was, in fact, Bürsöly who did not submit the necessary paperwork—a photo and his old passport for extension—and that, nevertheless, he did receive financial aid.¹²⁵ The Dutch consul general advised Komor to refuse to help Bürsöly so that he would be compelled to apply solely to the Czechoslovak Benevolent Society.¹²⁶

Komor showed much less leniency toward László Hudec, another ex-POW in Shanghai balancing on the edges of post-Habsburg Czechoslovak and Hungarian national identities. The young Slovak-Magyar bilingual architect who would emerge soon as the designer of some of interwar Shanghai's most emblematic landmarks, László/Ladislav Hudec (b. Hügyecz, 1893–1958) started as the Komors' lodger.¹²⁷ Freshly out of the Budapest Polytechnic University, Hudec fought in World War I, fell into Russian captivity, and in 1918, fearing forced enlistment in the anti-Bolshevik Czechoslovak Legion, fled Civil War Russia to China. In Shanghai, Hudec made probably the most successful refugee soldier career, having climbed the ladder at an American company and marrying into a wealthy local German family before opening his private firm. Hudec built his and Paul Komor's villa in the suburbs, and their relationship was cordial for about a decade.¹²⁸ However, Hudec's juggling of two national identities didn't inspire empathy in the Hungarian community's doyen, whose family was similarly used to navigating between its (Austro-)Hungarian, British, German, and Jewish affiliations. Perhaps, it was precisely the experience of postwar British expulsion, i.e., having to choose between loyalties in response to acts of exclusion, that taught Komor that dual allegiance was impossible and, therefore, not to be tolerated.

By the 1930s, Paul Komor's irredentism-fueled patriotism and exclusionary definition of national loyalty ultimately drove a wedge between the Shanghai Hungarian community's two leading figures.

diaocha baogao 上海公共租界工部局總辦處關於捷克斯洛伐克和南斯拉夫在中國的社團調查報告 [The Shanghai International Settlement's Municipal Council's Report on Czechoslovak and Yugoslav organizations in China], 1940, SMA, U1-4-3777.

¹²⁴Komor, "To T. Elink Schuurman, Vice-Consul in Shanghai Re: Franz Bürsöly," 18 August 1930, MNL, OL, K672, 1917–1926, 1.cs., No. 2507.

¹²⁵Jaroslav Štěpán, "To T. E. Schuurman, Vice-Consul in Shanghai Re: Franz Bürsöly," 20 August 1930, MNL, OL, K672, 1.cs., No. 2507.

¹²⁶T. E. Schuurman, "To Paul Komor Re: Franz Bürsöly," 21 August 1930, MNL, OL, K672, 1.cs., No. 2548.

¹²⁷Lajos Király, *Selmebányai ifjúság, szibériai hadifogság* [Youth in Selmebánya, Captivity in Siberia] (Budapest, 2005), 110, 118; Paul Komor Diaries, Entry 25 September 1919.

¹²⁸"A Hungarian Flag Flies in Front of the Residence of the Komor Family at 92 Amherst Road in Shanghai. Designed by Hungarian Architect Wladislaus [sic!] Hudec, the Komor Home Was Built in 1929," photo, ca. 1929, USHMM, No. 94759, accessed on 12 July 2020, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1131192>.

Motivated by a mix of personal and political incentives, from the 1930s on, Komor's letters to the Permanent Bureau's director included scathing criticism of anyone switching nationalities, like an "ex-Hungarian clique"¹²⁹ whose members "turn their cloak as the wind blows."¹³⁰ But while Komor's resentment toward ex-co-nationals at the blurry fringes of his "kingdom" waned when he eventually was reunited with many of them in the Jewish refugee relief,¹³¹ he held onto his grudge against Hudec for not complying with his ideal of clear-cut national loyalty. It didn't help that the architect was flirting not with the "brother-in-law" Austria but with the "archenemy" Czechoslovakia.

In passport applications on behalf of destitute compatriots, Komor regularly justified the petition of the given "far more deserving" applicant by pointing out the villain-like opportunism of the former Czechoslovak citizen Hudec, who could legitimize his claims only by obtaining Hungarian citizenship.¹³² Conveniently disregarding his father's wartime charity donations to both British and Austro-Hungarian soldiers, Komor declared that Hudec was "dipping his bucket into two wells" when attending the celebration of the "theft of Upper Hungary," i.e., the consular reception for the Czechoslovak Independence Day.¹³³ Showing no understanding of Hudec's pre-ethnic *Hungarus* consciousness,¹³⁴ he declared that a "true Hungarian" could not attend T.G. Masaryk's birthday celebration¹³⁵ and called for an investigation of Hudec's "allegiances," even suggesting that he be deprived of his Hungarian nationality.¹³⁶ Komor's animosity only increased when antisemitic legislation cast doubt on his own citizenship, and in 1940, he was eventually removed by the "Hudec-clique" from the community's leadership. In a letter, he cracked a milder anti-Slovak slur suggesting Hudec's uncivilized, montane pastoral heritage.¹³⁷ Being challenged in his irredentist fantasies and called an extremist by Hudec surely didn't mend the rift between the two men. Unlike the Jewish Komors, who benefitted from Hungary's pre-WWI assimilationist measures, in Hudec's family, the daily struggles of László's uncle, a Lutheran Slovak educator, instilled aversion against the same policies.¹³⁸ In a way, as Komor's situation worsened, instead of turning against the exclusionary state, he internalized paranoia at home and doubled down on "traitors."

While the two men bickered, economic hardships, war, internal schism, and the Hungarian government's antisemitic and pro-Axis policies all took their toll on the HRF. During the recession caused by the Japanese encroachment in China, almost every donor, including Komor, reduced their subscriptions. Hudec, whose name appeared on the balance sheets in 1930,¹³⁹ was the only one to increase his contribution and, thus, his authority. Even more than economic conditions, the news of

¹²⁹The dermatologist Reiss (b. Sámuel Reisz, 1891–1981) and the businessman Ernst Kelen (b. Ernő Kohn, 1896–1981) were born to Jewish Hungarian families in West Hungary. Due to postwar border changes, they became Austrian citizens while retaining their Hungarian self-identities during their interwar Shanghai years. Reiss, a dermatology professor at China's leading medical colleges (Kasuke Ito, "Frederick Reiss, 1891–1981," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 61, no. 4 (1985): 378–84), occasionally performed medical examinations for poor, HRF-supported Hungarians. Frederick Reiss, "Certification of F. Tóth's Medical Examination," 9 April 1925, MNL, OL, K672, 1. cs. Kelen was a co-founder of the HRF, while his company, Molnár & Greiner, was one of its staunchest corporate donors. Komor, "To Woo Ting May, Molnár & Greiner Comprador," 9 April 1936, No. 584. Reiss and Kelen were active in the local Austrian community; Reiss founded and led China's only Austrian freemason lodge. See Marcus G. Patka, *Österreichische Freimaurer im Nationalsozialismus: Treue und Verrat* (Vienna, 2010), 138. Meanwhile, Kelen served as Honorary Consul of Austria before the Anschluss. Agstner, "Personalverzeichnis," 399.

¹³⁰Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau," 5 July 1931, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3.

¹³¹"Hungarians, Czechs, and Austrians of every religion" in Michel Speelman, "Letter to Mr. M. Troper," 12 January 1940, JDC, ID 455682.

¹³²Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Lázár Ehrenthal stateless Hungarian's case, analogy of Hudec," 16 December 1931, No. 139.

¹³³Komor, "To Dutch Acting Consul General G.M. Byvanck," 31 October 1932, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 147.

¹³⁴Júlia Csejdy, "Besztercebányától Sanghajig. Hudec László építész életútja [From Besztercebánya to Shanghai. The Life of László Hudec]," *Kommentár*, no. 5 (2009): 48–59, 50.

¹³⁵Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau," 16 December 1931, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 103.

¹³⁶Komor, "To Dutch Acting Consul General G.M. Byvanck," 31 October 1932, No. 147.

¹³⁷Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau," 31 July 1940, No. 1012.

¹³⁸August Skultéry, Hudec's maternal uncle, was the principal of the first Slovak-language high school until the 1874 crack-down on non-Hungarian-language schools. Csejdy, 48.

¹³⁹Hudec's appearance might have been related to his recently obtained Hungarian citizenship; however, Júlia Csejdy's study (without primary source reference) dates Hudec's Hungarian citizenship only to 1938. Csejdy, 57.

anti-Jewish legislation in Hungary turned away some of the most steadfast contributors, who, like general manager Milch, revoked his decade-long support, not wishing to contribute to a society that barred him from equal rights.¹⁴⁰ In 1940, a changed composition of the community's active membership elected Hudec over Komor as chairman of a new organization.¹⁴¹ Komor conceded and agreed to transfer the HRF's remaining funds¹⁴² but immediately established the "Komor Charity Fund" for donors distancing themselves from Hudec's.¹⁴³ The same year, in response to Hungary's joining the Tripartite Pact, the Dutch government-in-exile relinquished the representation of Hungarian interests in China,¹⁴⁴ ending its more than two decades-long cooperation with the community.¹⁴⁵ Without its old patrons' support, the Dutch institutional scaffolding, and Paul Komor's trusteeship, the HRF ceased functioning.

After serving for decades as the arbiter and prosecutor of controversial cases of citizenship, it was Komor himself whom Hungary's antisemitic legislation put at the defendant's table. "What kind of a Hungarian, if Hungarian at all (*was für ein Ungar, wenn überhaupt Ungar*)" he was, had been preoccupying him since the 1938 first anti-Jewish law,¹⁴⁶ but it was ultimately the stifling bureaucracy that deprived him of his passport. In 1938, due to poor communication between Budapest and The Hague, the official statement about Hungary's changing passport regulations did not reach Shanghai in time. When, a year later, Komor requested a new passport via the Budapest diaspora organization, he was told to apply via the Dutch consular line. When Komor learned about the high fees and tedious paperwork required to prove his nationality, he was bitterly disappointed by the "ungratefulness" of the Hungarian state. The compulsive writer, who had spent his entire adult life in daily correspondence with multiple authorities, took pains to author dozens of letters to newspaper editors and, for a decade, reported in a thousand letters about the ongoings of his community, decided not to proceed with his passport application.¹⁴⁷

While it is sadly ironic that the man who arranged identification for so many finally lost his own, a link so dear to him, it should not come as a surprise. The fact that no one from the state apparatus was keen to resolve the issue and that the 1943-established Shanghai Hungarian Consulate was headed by the "Original Christian" (*őskeresztény*) László Hudec fits neatly into the legal exclusion of Hungary's Jews from civil service. Nevertheless, while the two post-Habsburg *Shanghailanders* might have never worked out their personalized political conflict, Honorary Consul Hudec showed compassion when his quasi-predecessor was in need. Probably oblivious of the past denunciations, between 1943 and 1945, Hudec authorized Mr. and Mrs. Komor's certificates of identity.¹⁴⁸ Allowing them to enjoy the privileges of a Hungarian national, Hudec was reciprocating Komor's assistance from the "good old days."

¹⁴⁰On 29 May 1938, the first anti-Jewish law excluded Jews from full participation in certain professions, barring their employment in civil service and restricting their opportunities in economic life. Joseph Milch withdrew his support after learning about the anti-Jewish measures, pointing out the high proportion of Jewish donations and the larger share of Christian recipients. Komor, "To Joseph Milch," 17 August 1938, MNL, OL, P975, 1–3, No. 834.

¹⁴¹The "Hungarian Benevolent Society [*Magyar Segélyező Egyesület*]," Komor, "To the Dutch Consul General G.W. Boissevain," 1 February 1940, MNL, OL, P975, 1–3, No. 963; under Hudec was soon renamed as "Hungarian Relief Society," Komor, "To A. Emödi," 15 March 1940, No. 967, then transformed into the "Hungarian Association."

¹⁴²Komor, "To L.E. Hudec," 1 February 1940, No. 964.

¹⁴³Komor, "To G.W. Boissevain," 5 February 1940, No. 969; Komor, "To L.E. Hudec," 1 February 1940, No. 964.

¹⁴⁴"Jegyzőkönyv a Harbini Magyar Egyesület Évi Közgyűlésén [Minutes of the Harbin Hungarian Association's Annual Meeting]," 28 December 1940, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 8.

¹⁴⁵Between 1941 and 1943, a short period before the Hungarian MFA set up its own consulates, Italian diplomats took over the role previously fulfilled by the Dutch. "Sr. Gennaro Pagano di Melito ... Italian Consul-General at Shanghai ... authorized to take charge of Hungarian affairs ...," 1941, BNA FO, FO371/27637.

¹⁴⁶The first and second Jewish laws, adopted by the Hungarian National Assembly in 1938 and 1939, respectively, defined a "Jew" as someone who was (or who had at least one parent or at least two grandparents) of Israelite (Jewish) confession. Komor would fall into this category. In his letter, he asked the director of the Permanent Bureau to check "what kind of a Hungarian" he was, considering that until 1 August 1919, he wasn't baptized, a stipulation of the 1920 *Numerus Clausus* law. Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau," 19 May 1938, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3, No. 805/91.

¹⁴⁷Komor, "To Károly Nagy, Permanent Bureau Re: Komor's passport and nationality," 13 March 1941, MNL, OL, P975, I-22, 1–3.

¹⁴⁸László Hudec, "Certificates of Identity and for Travel," 1942–1945, MNL, OL, K103, 7.

Despite both settling in California after leaving Civil War China in 1948, there is no evidence that they kept in touch.

Conclusion

The chaos that followed the Habsburg monarchy's dissolution gave rise to new figures on the fringes of the empire. In the 1920s, figures like Paul Komor built personal networks and rose to prominence amidst the postimperial void. Nurturing personal influence and networks through relief measures and quasi-consular tasks became a key strategy to win a central role in semi-colonial China's growing post-Habsburg communities. His over two-decades-long relief activities in East Asia showed that the increasingly exclusive understanding of Hungarianness only came to play a role for him in the late 1930s. Regardless of the many conflicts between Komor and the increasingly Fascist-leaning Hungarian government, his biography reveals that his community-building through relief and patronage in a time of statelessness proved a crucial experience for the "next chapter" of his work at the helm of the International Committee, aiding thousands of Shanghai Jewish refugees during WWII.