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Europe's Sense of Time Lost at the Edge of War

The author, an ethnic Malaysian-Chinese who studied in England and France in the 1970s and 1980s, reflects on the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the context of the traumatic twentieth century history of Europe and the renewed Cold War with Russia. A continent in turmoil needs to reach deep down into its spiritual roots and find its true voice in averting a Third World War between the globalist, liberal agenda of the European Union and the nation-state authoritarian agenda of Russia.

European cities have always fascinated me not so much for their art, music or literature, though these are impressive testaments to the heights of civilized culture. Not even the intellectual vivacity of the Europeans, who can be as pedantic and pretentious as any other urban people around the world.

No. The one thing that resounded in my soul is the echo of a cathedral, an empty chamber hall, a promenade of columns. Europe in

the early 1970s and 1980s had this strange air of melancholy and spiritual depth (or death, if you will). Yet, there was nothing clearly spiritual about modern European art and literature. Therein lies the paradox (like the rich harvest of wheat fields of Van Gogh paintings versus the empty streets of De Chirico's works).

It was as if God himself or a Messiah had visited the European cities, stayed for a few nights as an anonymous stranger and then left to never return. Perhaps, He decided it was better to leave a spiritual vacuum in Europe with all their existential angst and self-centered, post-modernist philosophies. That whisper of a spiritual longing, traumatized by centuries of intra-European wars, may one day turn into a loud cry of desperation.

I know. As an ethnic Chinese student, I stayed in Europe for a decade split between the 1970s and 1980s: mostly London and Paris, cities of many beautiful streets, squares, and palaces. What the Chinese-American architect, I.M. Pei, said about buildings as the mirror of life—"the presence of the past, the spirit of a place"—is ironically true of Europe.¹ The vast spaces and confluence of Baroque and iconic buildings stand as silent witnesses to the tragic experience of Europeans in the horrendous two world wars of the twentieth century.

And if one is quietly alert, you can almost hear something like an echo of an inner longing for a time lost, *le temps perdu*. The most evocative description of that echo resonates in some of the classical music of the Baroque period. Listening to Bach/Marcello's Adagio from Oboe Concerto in D Minor (second movement) in its various forms (piano, violin, guitar), one can grasp the weight of lost longing.

¹ I.M. Pei, "For Changing the World, One Building at a Time, Lifetime Achievement Award," Asia Society, <https://asiasociety.org/asia-game-changers/im-pei>.



A New Crisis at Europe's Doorstep

That cry for a long-lost teacher, a spiritual guide, a Renaissance man or woman has never been more desperate in times of crises such as the present war rumblings in Ukraine. For the first time since the Second World War ended in 1945, a major European nation has been attacked and invaded by a foreign superpower. The reverberations of the new war are being felt across the world especially in Southeast Asia where I reside. Economically, rising fuel and food prices had already spiked up before the war and will continue to hit our living costs.

Geopolitically, the Russian invasion of a sovereign country may be a dark harbinger of what might soon happen to Taiwan and to the stability of Southeast Asian countries (at the outset, only two members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Singapore and Indonesia, condemned the Russian invasion but as the conflict intensified, a total of eight Asean member states voted for a UN resolution condemning it). But there is more than meets the eye.

On the one hand, the globalist Great Reset elite of Europe in alliance with some of their American peers, are planning a new world order, politically, economically, and militarily. That new world order is modeled after the European Union, a concept that is politically flawed as it subsumes the sovereignty of nations under its umbrella to the laws of the EU state. (Incidentally, the insight into this flaw was revealed to me in a conversation with the theoretical founder of the Euro, the late Canadian economist Robert Mundell, who said: "The currency union would work perfectly on the assumption of free labor mobility."² In simple terms, it assumes a jobless Spanish factory worker can move to Germany to find a similar job there. The cultural

² Author interview with Robert Mundell, "An Asian Common Currency: The Case For and Against," *Smart Investor*, September 2000.

and social differences are simply too stark for this ideal state to ever be achieved.)

On the other hand, Russia's nationalist President Vladimir Putin is clearly looking to achieve his life-long goal to rebuild the Soviet empire while China's president-for-life is also eyeing Taiwan. The Cold War between the liberal Western democracies and the autocratic communist regimes in the East never ended in December 1991. It simply went into hibernation and infiltrated American universities and Congress through ideological subversion, a process clearly described by former KGB propaganda agent Yuri Bezmenov, who defected to Canada in 1970.³

How to resolve the war in Ukraine? Ukraine, on its own, a nation with a surprisingly small GDP of US\$165 billion despite its vast natural resources, does not matter as much to the Western European nations as it does strategically to Putin. As a tactical move to de-escalate tensions between Russia and Ukraine at its borders, the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation could just as well have told Putin that Ukraine will not be a member of NATO for the "time being" in lieu of rescinding the NATO 2008 Bucharest declaration which promised to accept Ukraine and Georgia into the military alliance. (We can recall what happened shortly after that declaration: Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008). But strangely, this de-escalating chess move was never put on the table of diplomatic negotiations before the invasion on February 24, 2022. Now, the world and most acutely the Ukrainians are suffering for that tactical mistake, which may have been intentionally made for reasons only the globalist elite may know.

³ Ankit Kumar, "Use of Deception in Warfare: Case of Russia," Centre for Land Warfare Studies, July 10, 2019, <https://www.claws.in/use-of-deception-in-warfare-case-of-russia/>.

If European politicians and the stumbling Biden administration have made a Faustian bargain to trade a pragmatic peace for an ideological clash of civilizations, then there is nothing we, citizens of the world, can do but pray and speak out against the plans of the warmongers. By all accounts, Russia's Putin is clearly the aggressor, and we shall see if he has the wisdom to just de-weaponize Ukraine as he claims, and hopefully leave the ravaged country to rebuild itself on its own prerogative as a neutral sovereign state.



The nurse Hana studying the frescoes in the Bacci Chapel, Basilica of San Francesco in Arezzo, Italy, in the film, *The English Patient*.

https://sikhchic.com/books/another_look_at_the_english_patient_the_book_the_film. Image by the courtesy of sikhchic.com.

Post-war restoration is perhaps a distant future. Yet, one cannot help but notice the swift change in the mainstream media's focus from the Covid-19 variant to the war. Just when the black swan of the

pandemic was near its end, another black swan swept into view like a Greek tragedy. This is why to keep our hearts and minds from the media's gloom and doom lens, a quiet meditation on ancient art, faith, and silent spaces is a refreshing balm to the soul. One recalls that brilliant scene in the movie *The English Patient* (based on the Second World War novel by Michael Ondaatje), where the war-weary nurse Hana is pulled up by a rope by her friend, Kirpal Singh, a Sikh sapper from the British-Indian Army, to admire with a torch the frescoed murals of an Italian cathedral; it is those quiet moments of joy that restore our sanity.

While the echo chambers of Europe resonate with rumors of war and confusion, the cry for wisdom from God or providence is what Europeans need to listen to. The key is not for each man and woman to ask the "how" and the "why" in this crisis, but to ask what has really ailed the nations of Europe for decades, and to wake up to the voice they have been listening to all this while: the voice of the wolf or the voice of the shepherd?

Note on the Author

Long Shih Rome was born in Singapore and raised as a Malaysian citizen, studied and lived in England and France throughout his primary school years before returning to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to complete his secondary schooling. In 1984, Long obtained a Bachelor of Science (Economics) honors degree, majoring in International Economics & Development at the London School of Economics & Political Science. He started his career in auditing at Price Waterhouse Kuala Lumpur before venturing briefly into business journalism for two years, first at the *Star* daily newspaper in Malaysia and then at the



Business Times of Singapore. Between 1989 to 1998, he worked as a senior equity analyst with various international investment banks ranging from OCBC Singapore to Deutsche Morgan Grenfell in Kuala Lumpur. After the Asian Financial Crisis, Long went back to journalism as the chief editor of *Smart Investor*, one of the leading financial magazines in Malaysia. During his five years at *Smart Investor*, he wrote cover stories on economics and investment topics including interviews with Nobel Prize Economics laureates Robert Mundell and Joseph Stiglitz in one issue on an Asian common currency regime. Long returned to the research line in 2003 with his current position as head of economics research at Public Mutual Bhd. Backed by a team of analysts, he oversees the macroeconomic research on the United States, China, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.