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*East-West Connections: Cultural Patterns, Cognitive Patterns
and a Good Life*

*East-West: Forgiveness as a Challenge
Across Cultural Patterns of Cognition*

*Svend Erik Larsen
Comparative Literature, Aarhus U
Academia Europaea*

Program:

- 1, 3 preliminaries
2. Photos of returning hostages
3. Cultural encounters and cultural conflicts
4. Basic notions and historical contexts
5. Yi Mun-Yol's *An Appointment with my Brother*

Cultural studies:

1) Centralized approach:

- a) description of intrinsic essential features
- b) parallel co-existence of cultures

2) Liminal approach

- a) mutual exchange of features
- b) dynamical overlap emphasized by radical transgression

US Iran hostages 1979



Return of hostages



Turkish ISIS hostages 2014



Korean Taliban hostages 2007



Radical transgression:

- 1) **Judiciary** - right/wrong in legal terms
- 2) **Ethics** - right/wrong in ethical terms
- 3) **Anthropology** - right/wrong according to what is regarded as human or non-human

1) Metaphysical/religious: formal principles for distinctions between right/wrong on the three levels held as universal in a given culture



- 1) Judiciary** - right/wrong in legal terms
- 2) Ethics** - right/wrong in ethical terms
- 3) Anthropology** - right/wrong according to what is regarded as human or non-human



2) Social/cultural: informal sense of justice defining the acceptance/non-acceptance of the principles in relation to habit and emotions

Sense of justice:

an ethical-emotional agreement shared by a larger or smaller cultural community translating informal and invisible norms are into human action attached to human responsibility. The sense of justice is historically contextualized and interacts with and underpins the formal legal system in the culture where it operates..

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Coping:

by retribution: paying back and redress a past balance disturbed by wrongdoing

by reconciliation: re-contextualizing the wrongdoing to allow for a re-evaluation negotiated in view of the future

Coping as reconciliation:

a **deliberate** individual or collective cultural act of coping with radical wrongdoing that draws on the power and **media** of **imagination** directed toward the **future**. By doing so it **re-contextualizes** radical wrongdoing and thereby offers the possibility of a **shared** reworking of **emotions** and **memories** related to the event.

Forgiveness as particular case of coping:

- 1) placing forgiveness in the **broader context of coping** as a relation between retribution and reconciliation
- 2) transforming it **from universal preaching** of Christian origin to an instrument for **local negotiation** in the context of other coping strategies and
- 3) from a metaphysical **principle** to an aspect of a **sense of justice**
- 4) de-universalize it by insisting on its **past and present historical context** and its inborn ambiguities

Forgiveness:

- 1) unconditional, repentance not required
- 2) universal, for everyone
- 3) remembrance, not forgetting
- 4) speech act, cannot be non-verbal
- 5) continuous practice, not a single act

Forgiveness – historical contexts:

1) Against Judaism, based on Judaism:

- against legalistic hierarchical dogmatism based on the covenant

2) Against Greek pagan norms, based on Greek language:

a) Greek – manifestation of power

synggnome = pardon as magnanimity, forbearance

b) Christian – Negated retributive metaphors, but no positive alternatives

Economy: *charizomai, aphesis = remittance without return*

Legal: *apo-luo = set free, physically or legally, without punishment,*

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Yi Mun-Yol: An Appointment with my Brother, 1994

Yi Hyeonseop from Seoul (narrator)

Yi Hyeok from the North



When Kaneko-san returned to Japan after release from China, he was publicly shamed - not for the war crimes he committed, but for confessing to them.[...] Nobody wanted these things to be said. Men like Kaneko-san and Sakakura-san were violating the collective decision to be silent and to deny. And for that too they could not find forgiveness.

(James Dawes : Men of Evil, 2013)

“Please give my love to my brothers and sisters.” Then I added, *like one who has made a grave decision*. “And *our mother*., too.” [verbal act of forgiveness]

One of my anxious uncertainties after I decided to meet my brother was how to call my brother's mother. Should I call her “mother in the North?” Or “my stepmother?” But none of them seemed appropriate. So, I had been making do with “your mother.” But she became “our mother” *in my mind at the moment of parting from my brother*.

In ancient Oriental law, there were exceptional cases where a second legal wife was authorized by law. To my modern *rational sensibility*, too, my brother's mother was fully entitled to be regarded as my mother. But I was *surprised* that “our mother” rolled out of my mouth so naturally, and started. My brother was *visibly affected*, too. His alcohol-clouded face sobering up at once, he gazed at me for a moment and bowed.

“Please, give my love to my sister and my nephews and nieces. And to *our mother*, too.” [affirmation and return of forgiveness]

“Our mother” seemed to roll out of his mouth quite naturally, too.”

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