A Discussion on the Correlations between Küng’s Global Ethic and Business Ethics-A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

In this study the correlation between Küng’s Global Ethic and business ethics is reviewed and organized in order to demonstrate how this topic was viewed by previous scholars along with a proposal of how these two topics can be joined together. Due to different methodologies for pursuing universal ethics, many scholars have came up with criticism and suggestions in order to further improve the practicality of Küng’s Global Ethic through the paradigm theory, the communication theory, the creativity theory, universalism, liberalism, limitation with induction, and unity in plurality. The findings of this study are discussed in the last section.

Keywords: Agency Problem; Corporate Governance; Business Ethics; Hans Küng; Global Ethic.

INTRODUCTION

Rethinking Küng’s Global Ethic

It is a consensus among many scholars that there are unique and important values in taking note of Küng’s Global Ethic or acknowledging the Universal Ethics in today’s globalized world. Tseng (2003) identifies Küng as having three roles: a theologian, a scholar of religious studies, and a scholar of ethics (Tseng, 2003: xx), and believes Küng’s philosophical system is formed by his explorations into topics such as the Doctrine of Church, ecumenism, the Ecumenical Movement, Catholicism, inter-religious dialogues, and Global Ethic. Chen (2000) refers to Küng as the pioneer of universal theology for his effort of reaching from Christianity to inter-religious dialogues and universalism (Chen, 2000: 155-157). Ho (1997) believes the essence of Küng’s Global Ethic is a manifestation of the minimum of ethnic values shared by different religions around the world (Küng and Kuschel, 1997: 2). Therefore, M. S. Kogen (1999) agrees with Küng’s practice of pursuing a commonality of ethics from the “Golden Rule” since it is infeasible to represent an absolute image of humankind with a single culture (Kogan, 1999: 105-108).

K. Mitra (1999) believes that the spirit behind Küng’s Global Ethic is consistent with the concept of “unity in plurality” in Hinduism (Mitra, 1999: 172-178). Li (2003) highly supports Küng’s emphasis on the existence of transcending and ultimate ethic orders and common morality and believes the latter’s work is an inspiration to Li’s emphasis of a universal and integrated humanism (Li, 2003: 383-388). Chang (2001) acknowledges that Küng’s Global Ethic manifests a specific form of feasibility which can be reflected from the attitude of caring for co-existence of cultures around the world and avoids being trapped inside a certain ethic or value system (Chang, 2001: 155-156). Ho (2002) agrees with the part of Küng’s Global Ethic that does not believe the norm of the expression of behaviors can be supported from logic, experience and common sense, and history and tradition because Küng believes social customs and commandments in different ethnic groups are tested numerous times for thousands of years. By the same
token, the construction of Global Ethic can also be understood through the principle of universality (Ho, 2002: 105-130).

What Küng’s Global Ethic is Lacking and can be Associated to

On the other hand, there are also many discussions on what Küng’s Global Ethic is lacking and can be associated to. In terms of feasible logic, W. P. George (1996) and K.-J. Kuschel (1990) both stressed that one must think about how Küng’s Global Ethic can reach a common ground with international politics and the Public International Law in order to become more feasible (Kuschel, 1990: 95-101; George, 1996). From the relationship between humankind and the universal root, the basis of humankind’s moral behaviors, and the fundamental driving force behind the practice of morality, Yu (2004) provided additional thinking that Küng’s Global Ethic lacks (Yu, 2004: 124-125). O. L. Chung (1999) takes the concepts of nirvana and “one world” from the Korean Buddhism and believes that Küng’s Global Ethic and inter-religious dialogues may achieve a paradise on Earth (Chung, 1999: 179-191). K. Duran (1999) also believes the Sufism branch of Islam already shares the spirit of inter-religious dialogues since the original intention of Muhammad is not to start a new religion. In essence, Küng’s Global Ethic should be able to be accepted by Muslims (Duran, 1999: 119-130).

Contemplating on Küng’s Global Ethic, T. Kollek (1996) agrees with Küng’s approach of seeking a minimum common ground from the religions, cultures, and traditions around the world (Kollek, 1996: 81-88). C. Sommaruga (1996) also acknowledges the sense of humanism established by Küng when constructing his Global Ethic, and believes that acknowledging others’ dignities and rights as human beings is the foundation for dialogues between different societies (Sommaruga, 1996: 54-56). B. A. Victoria (1999) pointed out that no words are used in Zen Buddhism, and one can reach enlightenment through meditation; therefore, without the restrictions imposed by doctrines, Küng’s Global Ethic could be better accepted (Victoria, 1999: 192-203). P. Shaeffer (1998) believes the concept of Global Ethic has already existed in the philosophy of Church Fathers for ages and can also be observed in the Easter Peace Message delivered by Pope John Paul II (Shaeffer, 1998).

Quite a few scholars also proposed additional thoughts regarding Küng’s Global Ethic in terms of its methodology. For example, E. von Dietze (1998) questioned Küng’s approach of using paradigms to deal with religious and cultural issues considering its incommensurability, and indicated that Küng should provide more details regarding whether comparisons and dialogues that go beyond their affiliated paradigms can be achieved, as well as what kinds of standards should be adopted to evaluate and compare different paradigms (Dietze, 1998). Chao (1997) places Küng’s Global Ethic in the domain of traditional ethnics and believes applied ethics, which better demonstrates the relevant ethical norms than distinctive behaviors do, should be the modern approach. Secondly, Chao believes the concept of Global Ethic is only a matter of choice to non-religious individuals and cannot be enforced as law. Lastly, from the perspective of the paradigm theory, Chao also questions Küng’s practice of establishing a global paradigm out of religions around the world (Chao, 1997).

From the perspectives of procedural ethics and communicative ethics, M. Robinson (1996) proposed that the procedures for establishing dialogues between two equal-status parties, including listening, sharing, and participation, should be included when constructing Global Ethic (Robinson, 1996: 42-45). Liu (2006) believes that when using induction to construct Global Ethic, Küng needs to avoid the trap of “keeping the similarities and dismissing the differences,” and thus proposes that though there is only one principle theory, it has diverse expressions – a phenomenon similar to the phrases “different classifications under one principle” and “one moon shines upon thousands of rivers” proposed by Zhu Xi.
Liu also agrees that the “humanity” proposed by Küng is the “benevolence” proposed by Confucius (Liu, 2006: 110-111). From the angle of cultural universality and uniqueness, Gu (2002) believes the uniqueness of humanity is the dimension for understanding cultural uniqueness, whereas the humanity basis in cultural universality is a natural attribute of humanity, and the humanity basis in cultural uniqueness is the social attribute of humanity. Thus, Gu does not agree with Küng’s practice of interpreting cultural universality as the eternal, common nature seen in all cultures during the construction of Global Ethic (Gu, 2002). Chi (2003), on the other hand, treats Küng’s Global Ethic and liberalism proposed by J. Rawls as two promising trends of universalism. Although the two are both based on the minimum ethics, they are different in terms of their logics and believe that the mutual dialects between universal religions and humanity – especially religions’ ultimate care for humanity, is the ultimate care for world peace (Chi, 2003).

D. R. Griffin (2007) agrees with Küng’s proposal that the solutions to global issues require Global Ethic, yet this concept is at the opposite side of the nihilism which has formed the modern world views. In the traditional theistic world view, followers believed that they could be enlightened by their religious doctrines without errors, and this is why they could not abandon non-unique ethics, morality, and doctrines. Therefore, Griffin proposed that the philosophical basis of Global Ethic should be based on the creativity theory proposed by A. N. Whitehead, and the interactions between God and creation not only forms unique ethics in human society but also universal, Global Ethic (Griffin, 2007). Chao (2004) adopts the perspectives of benevolence and the five norms (benevolence, righteousness, mannerism, wisdom, and faith) in Confucianism to establish the internal requirements for ethics in order to reach the level of “changes from inside out” stressed by Confucianism; these thoughts were proposed as a way to further complete Küng’s Global Ethic. Chao acknowledges Küng’s practice of seeking a common value from different religions and cultures, but also pointed the shortcoming of its lack of binding forces (Chao, 2004).

F. S. Zhao (1999) also proposed that Confucianism’s “love for society” and Taoism’s “love for nature” both are invaluable, spiritual heritage, and the mutual understanding and dialogues between different cultures would facilitate the construction of a Global Ethic (Zhao, 1999: 145-153). Though believing the Küng’s Declaration of a Global Ethic is based on Western liberalism, M. Momen (1999) also acknowledges that most of the ideas in the Global Ethic are consistent with those of Baha’i. However, Momen also suspects that Küng’s Global Ethic is not built on metaphysics and transcending foundations but on induction (Momen, 1999: 131-144). G. Paul (2000) examined the Global Ethic from the perspective of universalism and proposed that humankind’s rational examination of the goals of life and topics in life would lead to humanistic norms. Given this concept, human rights and dignities promoted in the Western culture can also be inferred from Chinese philosophy (Paul, 2002: 67-82).

K. H. Pohl (2000) treats Confucianism as a perceptual universalism and Western philosophy as rational universalism. In addition, he believes that morality must have localized basis and thus must be unique; therefore, the global universality and local universality in ethics do not reject but actually complement each other. He thus agrees with viewing Küng’s Global Ethic and cross-cultural dialogues between the Chinese and Western culture from the concept of “unity in plurality.” Gao (2002) acknowledges Liu’s practice of using “different classifications under one principle” as the norm for constructing Küng’s Global Ethic; secondly, he believes Küng is looking for a possible, rational basis for Global Ethic and should not be criticized for not having a foundation of ethnics. The spirit behind Küng’s Global Ethic is the concept of “unity in plurality.”
Küng’s Global Ethic is about the awareness of life and values rather than having a detailed scheme. Lastly, Gao believes that by dealing with the flaws in each culture, a universal ethic can be achieved indirectly (Gao, 2002: 99-123). Regarding universal ethics, Ye (1996) believes that we need different models to gather rational materials from humanistic resources in order to interpret the meaning of “good,” achieve a balance between self-discipline and disciplining others, and pursue a universal implication during the process of returning to one’s “self.” (Ye, 1996: 229-231)

**Relationship between Küng’s Global Ethic and Business Ethics**

When discussing the issue of personal ethics and business ethics, P. F. Drucker (1993) believes the most important category of ethics is “honesty,” and no one should violate the daily, ethic norm even when expected to do so for work and job-related reasons. Business ethics and personal ethics are therefore not different from each other. Another important ethical duty among the norm is “having no intent to harm” (Primum Non Nocere) (Drucker, 1993: 366-368). Extending this argument by Drucker, Wu (2000) examined modern business ethics from the perspective of Buddhism – a religion followed by many, and believes that the concepts of equality and mercy developed based on the Buddhist philosophy are consistent with ideas in modern business ethics such as honesty, product safety and obligations, and fair competition. Other actions promoted by Buddhism such as altruism, donation, and educating the public also activities in business ethics such as giving back to society, formulating moral obligations, and morality training (Wu, 2000: 83-99).

Contemplating on business ethics from Confucian ethics, Sun (2004) quotes and uses the “Sixth Ethic Doctrine” (“one for all”) proposed by Kuo-ding Li as the source of norm in business ethics. Sun pointed out that in the Five Ethic Doctrines of Confucianism, the relationship between an individual and a specific entity is interdependent, yet the relationship between two individuals and the non-specific general public lacks the direct and confirmed interdependency. Therefore, the traditional Five Ethic Doctrines are treated as private ethics whereas the Sixth Ethic Doctrine is treated as a public ethic, which can be fully manifested through business ethics (Sun, 2004: 193-206). S. Rothlin (2004) established the International Business Ethics Theory from the perspective of universal ethics, and adopted Confucian concepts to complement Western philosophy. Acknowledging the diversity of traditional ethics, Rothlin established eighteen rules for his theory because he believes each culture has a common basis for ethic rules and thus attempted to provide a set of philosophical principles that can apply to all cultures and serves as a source of international business ethics (Rothlin, 2004: 3,14).

When discussing the principles of business ethics, Küng (1998) utilized universal values such as the fundamental respect and attitude for humankind implied by “An Interfaith Declaration, A Code of Ethics on International Business for Christians, Muslims and Jews, London” (1993) and “The Caux Round table, Principles For Business” (1994) to support his proposals in the Declaration of Global Ethic. Moreover, from the perspective of “ethical leadership” he proposed characters shared by brilliant business leaders, which are shared by the ethic doctrines that have existed in human society for ages (the principles of Global Ethic) and transform into specific actions and business decisions (Küng, 1998: 251-253, 274-275).

**Integrative Social Contracts Theory, ISCT**

T. Donaldson and T. Dunfee (1999) examined the positive and negative impacts brought onto the society by businesses’ production and sales activities, and proposed that a set of social contracts that can regulate the these impacts between businesses and a society should be considered and proposed and utilized to construct business ethics theories. This kind of contract should cover all stakeholders that are affiliated to businesses, thus the two scholars also proposed the “Integrative Social Contracts Theory,” or
ISCT, in which social contracts are further divided into macro social contracts and micro social contracts. When determining which business ethic doctrines apply to the macro social contracts, Donaldson and Dunfee adopted the universal human values proposed by philosophers and joint agreements and declarations announced by major international organizations as the main source for the doctrines in the macro social contracts. Of the sources of the proposed business ethic hyper norms, Küng is not only one of the philosophers acknowledged by the two scholars, but whose Declaration of Global Ethic petitioned in the Parliament of World Religions is also one of the major sources of the hyper norms (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1999: 42-52, 69-73).

H.-Y. Lin reviewed the social contract theories proposed by T. Hobbs, J. Locke, J.- J. Rousseau, J. Rawls, and Li Lin and attempted to determine the content of the social contract between businesses and the society from the perspective of businesses’ social responsibilities. Lin agrees with how Donaldson and Dunfee treat Küng’s Global Ethic as the source of the hyper-norms of the social contracts and use it to construct business ethics, and further pointed out that Küng himself is a follower of the social contract theory (Lin, 2007).

In our study the scholars who acknowledge the philosophy behind Küng’s Global Ethic as well as their own proposals are listed in Table 1-1; scholars who believe there is room for improvement in Küng’s Global Ethic as well as their own proposals are listed in Table 1-2; scholars who associated Küng’s Global Ethic or universal ethics with business ethics as well as their own proposals are listed in Table 1-3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kollek (1996)</td>
<td>Agrees with Küng’s practice of seeking a minimum commonality among religions and cultures around the world.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Sommaruga (1996) | 1. Agrees with the spirit of humanity established by Küng when constructing Global Ethic.  
2. Acknowledges that human dignity and rights are the foundation for inter-society dialogues. |
2. The spirit behind Küng’s Global Ethic can be discovered in the Easter Peace Message delivered by Pope John Paul II. |
| Zhao (1999) | 1. Confucianism’s “love for society” and Taoism’s “love for nature” are both the world’s spiritual heritage.  
2. Dialogues between different cultures facilitate the construction of Global Ethic. |
| Victoria (1999) | In Zen Buddhism, no words are used, and Küng’s Global Ethic can be better accepted. |
| Kogen (1999) | 1. Agrees with Küng’s practice of pursuing a commonality of ethnics from the “Golden Rule.”  
2. It is infeasible to represent an absolute image of humankind with a single culture. |
| Mitra (1999) | Believes that the spirit behind Küng’s Global Ethic is consistent with the concept of “unity in plurality” in Hinduism. |
| Chung (1999) | Takes the concepts of nirvana and “one world” from the Korean Buddhism, and believes that Küng’s Global Ethic and inter-religious dialogues may achieve a paradise on Earth. |
| Duran (1999) | Believes the Sufism branch of Islam already shares the spirit of inter-religious dialogues, and in essence, Küng’s Global Ethic should be able to be accepted by Muslims. |
Ho (2000)

1. Agrees with the part of Küng’s Global Ethic that does not believe the norm of the expression of behaviors can be supported from logic, experience and common sense, and history and tradition.
2. The construction of Global Ethic can also be understood through the principle of universality.

Chang, S. (2001)

1. Acknowledges that Küng’s Global Ethic manifests a specific form of feasibility.
2. Which can be reflected from the attitude of caring for co-existence of cultures around the world and avoids being trapped inside a certain ethic or value system.

Gao (2002)

1. Acknowledges Liu’s practice of using “different classifications under one principle” as the norm for constructing Küng’s Global Ethic.
2. Believes Küng is looking for a possible, rational basis for Global Ethic and should not be criticized for not having a foundation of ethnics.
3. Believes the spirit behind Küng’s Global Ethic is about the awareness of life and values.
4. Believes that by dealing with the flaws in each culture, a universal ethic can be achieved indirectly.

Li (2003)

1. Acknowledges Küng’s emphasis on the existence of transcending and ultimate ethic orders and common morality.
2. Believes Küng’s work is an inspiration to Li’s proposal of a universal and integrated humanism.

Source: Compiled by the Researcher of this Study

Table 1-2: Proposals by Scholars Believing there is Room for Improvement in Küng’s Global Ethic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuschel (1990)</td>
<td>Integrates Küng’s Global Ethic with the Public International Law in order to enhance the practicality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George (1996)</td>
<td>Integrates Küng’s Global Ethic with international politics in order to enhance the practicality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson (1996)</td>
<td>Proposed that the procedures for establishing dialogues between two equal-status parties, including listening, sharing, and participation, should be included when constructing the Global Ethic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ye (1996)</td>
<td>Believes that we need to interpret the meaning of “good,” achieve a balance between self-discipline and disciplining others, and pursue a universal implication during the process of returning to one’s “self” when contemplating on universal ethic values.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Chao (1997)    | 1. Believes the Global Ethic is only a matter of choice to non-religious individuals and cannot be enforced as law.  
                 2. Questions Küng’s practice of establishing a global paradigm out of religions around the world. |
| Dietze (1998)  | 1. Questions Küng’s approach of using paradigms to deal with religious and cultural issues due to its incommensurability.  
                 2. Believes that Küng should explain whether comparisons and dialogues that go beyond their affiliated paradigms can be achieved, and what kind of standards should be used to evaluate and compare different paradigms. |
| Momen (1999)   | 1. Believes the declaration of Küng’s Global Ethic is based on the Western liberalism, but he also acknowledges that most of the ideas in which are consistent with those of Baha’i.  
                 2. Questions Küng’s practice of establishing Global Ethic not on metaphysics and transcending foundations but on induction. |
Paul (2000)
1. Examines Global Ethic from the perspective of universalism.
2. Proposed that humankind’s rational examination of the goals of life and topics in life would lead to humanistic norms.
3. Believes human rights and dignities promoted in the Western culture can also be inferred from Chinese philosophy.

Pohl (2000)
1. Treats Confucianism as a perceptual universalism and Western philosophy as rational universalism.
2. Believes that morality must have localized basis and thus must be unique; therefore, the global universality and local universality in ethics do not reject each other but complement each other.
3. Review Küng’s Global Ethic and cross-cultural dialogues between the Chinese and Western culture from the concept of “unity in plurality.”

Gu (2002)
Disagrees with Küng’s practice of interpreting cultural universality as the eternal, common nature seen in all cultures.

Chi (2003)
1. Treats Küng’s Global Ethic and liberalism proposed by Rawls as two promising trends of universalism.
2. Believes that religions’ ultimate care for humanity is the ultimate care for world peace.

Chao (2004)
Uses the perspectives of benevolence and the five norms to establish the internal requirements for ethics in order to reach the level of “changes from inside out” stressed by Confucianism as an attempt to further complete Küng’s Global Ethic.

Yu (2004)
Provides additional thinking that Küng’s Global Ethic lacks with the relationship between humankind and the universal root, the basis of humankind’s moral behaviors, and the fundamental driving force behind the practice of morality.

Liu (2006)
1. Believes that when using induction to construct Global Ethic, Küng needs to avoid the trap of “keeping the similarities and dismissing the differences.”
2. Proposes “different classifications under one principle” and “one moon shines upon thousands of rivers.”

Griffin (2007)
Proposes that the philosophical basis of Global Ethic should be based on the creativity theory, and the interactions between God and creation not only forms unique ethics in human society but also universal, Global Ethic.

Source: Compiled by the Researcher of this Study

Table 1-3: Proposals by Scholars Associating Küng’s Global Ethic or Universal Ethics with Business Ethics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
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| Drucker (1974) | 1. Believes the most important category of ethics is “honesty,” and no one should be above the daily, ethic norm  
2. Business ethics and personal ethics are not different from each other.  
3. An important ethical duty among the norm is “having no intent to harm” (Primum Non Nocere). |
2. Divide social contracts into macro social contracts and micro social contracts.  
3. Acknowledge Küng as one of the philosophers who provide the source of business ethic hyper norms and whose Declaration of Global Ethic as one of the major sources of the hyper norms. |
| Sun (2004) | 1. Quotes and uses the “Sixth Ethic Doctrine” proposed by Kuo-ding Li (“one for all”) as the source of norm in business ethics.  
2. Treats the traditional Five Ethic Doctrines as private ethics and the Sixth Ethic Doctrine as a public ethic, which can be fully manifested through business ethics. |
CONCLUSION

Constructing the Implications of Business Ethics through Küng’s Global Ethic

In the previous sections, past studies on the correlations between Küng’s Global Ethic and business ethics are reviewed. In the following section the above literatures are discussed in order to determine enlightening implications.

From the above discussions we see that Küng’s Global Ethic has received much attention, indicating the importance of universal ethics in his thinking. People from different cultures, backgrounds, and religions can find something in common with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Zen, Catholicism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Humanism through the principles and concepts of Küng’s Global Ethic. In addition, most scholars focus on implications such as commonality, universality, transcendence, ultimacy, and practicality in Küng’s Global Ethic, and also acknowledge the humanism and inter-religious dialogues in Küng’s thinking. However, they have not yet discussed “Christianity indigenization” implied by the Global Ethic that Küng wishes to apply to global politics and economics.

Due to different methodologies for pursuing universal ethics, many scholars have come up with criticism and suggestions in order to further improve the practicality of Küng’s Global Ethic through the paradigm theory, the communication theory, the creativity theory, universalism, liberalism, limitation with induction, and unity in plurality. Examples include combining the content of Global Ethic, international politics, and the Public International Law, and to use the Confucian self-discipline as a way to actualize the internal regulation in Küng Global Ethic. However, not many scholars reviewed Global Ethic through the methodology and approach of the social contract theory, and only Donaldson and Dunfee (1999) treated Küng’s philosophy and the Declaration of Global Ethic announced in the Parliament of World Religions in 1999 as the source for their ISCT, who also have not examined the global social contract implications in Küng’s Global Ethic methodologically. In this present study, therefore, additional interpretations are provided in future. Drucker (1993) believe business ethics and personal ethics are no different from each other, thus many scholars have not intentionally separated these two when discussing Küng’s Global Ethic (Drucker, 1993: 366-368). However, there are also quite a few scholars who discuss Küng’s Global Ethic (or universal ethics) and business ethics together. Donaldson & Dunfee (1999) and H.- Y. Lin (2007) all constructed business ethics through the social contract approach and treated Küng’s Global Ethic as the source of business ethic norms, thus joining Küng’s Global Ethic and business ethics (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1999: 42-52, 69-73; Lin, 2007).

2. Adopted Confucian concepts to complement Western philosophy.  
3. Established 18 Rules of International Business Ethics under the premise of acknowledging the diversity of traditional ethics. |
| Lin (2007) | 1. Reviews the social contract theories proposed by Thomas Hobbs, John Locke, Jean- Jacques Rousseau, John Rawls, and Li Lin and attempts to determine the content of the social contract between businesses and the society from the perspective of businesses’ social responsibilities.  
2. Agrees with how Donaldson and Dunfee treat Küng’s Global Ethic as the source of the hyper norms of the social contracts and use it to construct business ethics, and further pointed out that Küng himself is a follower of the social contract theory. |

Source: Compiled by the Researcher of this Study
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