The Coordination Function of Islamic Ethics in Transforming Islamic Societies

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Abstract: *Based on the Quran and the Hadith, Islamic ethical norms play an important role in the coordination of social relations. It mainly refers to coordinating the relationship between individuals, the relationship between individuals and society, the relationship between Muslim individuals and society, taking on social responsibilities and duties and functioning as a spiritual power for the Muslims in their subsistence.*

Key Words: *Islamic Culture; Ethics; Religion and International Relations; Middle East Society*

The social order of the Middle East society cannot simply rely on the rule of the law for the solution to many problems there requires the coordination of Islamic ethics. With Islamic thought as the mainstream culture of the Islamic society, "the Islamic ethics mainly elaborates the interpersonal behavior norms that should be observed in the real world; these norms are all made in accordance with the *Quran* and the sermons in the Hadith."(Wang, 1997:46). In fact, they have been playing an important part in coordinating social relations. Although the Islamic ethics, known quite well among Muslims, is not difficult to understand, it is no easy job to put it into practice.

I. Coordinating the Interpersonal Relations and the

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Relationship between Individual and Society

Islam advocates strict ethical and moral standards. "Ethics is a specific form of social awareness, the sum of all behavior norms that coordinate the relationship between individuals and that between individual and society" (Fu & Huang, 1987:120). The social function of Islamic ethics is to regulate and coordinate various social relations and deal with various discords, which usually include the interpersonal relationships and the relationships between individuals and society. The coordination in Islamic societies, bound by the law, Fiqh and self-discipline, is carried out under the regulation of social behavior norms. It has been a common view in Islamic societies that ethics is talisman to the adjustment of interpersonal relationships. Social coordination intends to solve problems or discords that exist between individuals, individual and society or various organizations through coordination work. "To coordinate interpersonal relationship, in the final analysis, is to adjust the interest relationship between individuals, that is to say, individuals should control their pursuit of interests and show some respect to others' interests so that the interests of individuals, of others and the overall interests of society may exist in harmony"(Wei, 2001:44). Islam believes that creating a harmonious relationship between human beings is an implication of creating harmony between man and Allah. Attaching great importance to the essence of ethical cultivation, Islam carries out, through Muslims, ethical practice and strives for the ideological and religious perfection of man so as to realize the perfection of personality. From the formation of Islamic ethics to the norms and code of practice for Muslims, the subject in discussion has been the human person. "There is also an order in morality, which does not only make the human person perfect but also help rectify social ethos."(1961: 126) Generally speaking, social security is somewhat maintained or even guaranteed as long as the interpersonal relationship and the relationship between individuals and society is coordinated.

Islamic ethics is a special form of social value. The nature of its good-oriented control system of religious morality is to restrain the

Muslims. It is one means used by Muslims to carry out social coordination through their judgment of right and wrong and a self -perfection practice as well. Both ethical regulations and legal regulations must bring into play their social guidance and coordination functions, which, in the final analysis, is determined by people's willingness of complying with and unconditionally abiding by these regulations. It appears that a law can be made and enforced by virtue of state power. However, without people's willingness and obedience, its enforcement would be rather limited or even rather weak. Only when "enforcement" is accepted as a kind of consciousness or duty and internalized as a responsibility can law enforcement truly take effect. Ethics places ethics enforcement on individuals through pressure from public opinion and its institutional measures and prompts the external discipline to transform into people's beliefs and self-discipline so as to strengthen people's awareness of their social responsibilities and duties and to increase their ability to fulfill their social responsibilities and duties. Therefore, the norms of Islamic ethics are the cement of a stable and vigorous society.

The doctrines of Islam repeatedly require that Muslims hold fast to their religious beliefs, urging them to maintain a high ethical standard and regulate their behavior. The top priority of the Islamic ethical thinking is to maintain the harmony of Islam, the harmony of the Islamic family and among Muslim brothers, that is to say, efforts are given to the basic theory, the standard and conduct of ethics before others so as to promote the social ethics to the level of harmony. Islamic ethics play an integration role when dealing with problems between individuals or social members. Every detail of their life is guided and controlled by religious thoughts. They always show their ethical behavior in a certain ethical relation and from time to time adjust their behavior accordingly. As a guideline when coordinating the social relations between individuals, ethics cannot go without the regulation of the code of conduct. Islamic ethics is capable of coordinating and adjusting all social relations such as family relations, neighborhood relations, workplace relations, leader-member relations, the collective and the individual relations and the individual and

society relations. Unlike ethics, the law does not have the responsibility of adjusting these relations. The characteristics of law are coerciveness and heteronomy while the characteristics of ethics are education, self-discipline and ethical value- oriented coordination. Heteronomy and self-discipline, complementing each other, is simply like the outside and the inside of the same thing. Of course, the law is also an efficient means to guarantee the effective practice of ethics.

Compared with the prevalent values in the Jahiliyah era(epoch of ignorance) before Islam, the civilized life advocated by Islam is apparently progressive. The icon-worshipping people in the Jahiliyah era loved to show off their status and power as well, while Islam injects into society some lofty new values which are mainly religious or ethical ones. Being a dynamic system, the Islamic ethics originates from life yet goes beyond it. It plays an extraordinary role when coordinating or tackling the interpersonal relations and the relationship between individual and society. Its coordination function is particularly noteworthy. For instance, it advocates unity and mutual help among Muslims, equality, freedom, collectivism, patriotism, leniency, and so on. "Ethics is a coordination system in social life and activities. It coordinates people's behavior and social activities and leads them toward specific interests through our notion, habit systems, conduct and quality regulation systems, ideal and belief systems"(Fu & Huang, 1987:146). The following two aspects reflect the coordination function of Islamic ethics: one is the universal criterion of ethical levels and the other is the content regulation of ethics.

The standardized Islamic ethical culture has a set of rules that guide and control people's social activities. Action in accordance with the code of ethics will gradually develop into a social principle which, after being widely accepted and implemented by the people, serves to make sure the society operates with order and efficiency. Broadly speaking, the code of ethics is a scale of assessing and judging social affairs and then a guide for action. A person started to learn regulations in his family, school and society the moment he was born and step by step became socialized. It is during this process of socialization that he gradually became a social man and accumulated ethical cultivation,

namely, he learned to internalize the regulations and turned them into conscious individual action or self-disciplined action. The so-called socialization simply means learning how to be a person: how to master social regulations; regulate, control and correct his social activities all the time; properly deal with and adjust his relationship with others so as to integrate into society. As a norm, Islamic ethical culture is able to determine or control people's actions, that is to say, it can regulate or prohibit expected wrongdoings beforehand.

Apart from its important mission of shaping individual morality, Islamic ethics even governs people's daily life. "Religion is the emotion and soul relations between individuals, which used to seek their truth in realistic illusions (by virtue of one god or many gods, i.e., illusions of human traits), that seek their truth from the love between you and me directly" (Marx & Engels,1995:233). Islam is of the opinion that Muslims must speak mildly. It has specific directions about what tune, pitch and words that Muslims should use when talking. According to Islam, Muslims should speak mildly and in a soft tune. The *Quran* points out, "And it is said unto those who ward off (evil): what hath your lord revealed? they say: Good"(Ma, 2003: 14:16:30). "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way"(Ma, 2003:14:16:125). Good words represent an individual's ethical cultivation. One must hold an equal and mild attitude when he talks with others and he must speak good words only. As everyone is a servant of Allah, no one is superior to others. Everyone should respect and care about each other. One should treat the humble with even more kindness instead of reproaching or bullying them. The *Quran* puts special stress on a friendly attitude to orphans, the poor and other weak groups. The *Quran* points out, "And when kinsfolk and orphans and the needy are present at the division (of the heritage), bestow on them therefrom and speak kindly unto them"(Ma, 2003:4:4:8). "And let those fear (in their behavior toward orphans) who if they left behind them weak offspring would be afraid for them. So let them mind their duty to Allah, and speak justly"(Ma, 2003:4:4:9). It is recorded that the Prophet Muhammad always spoke in a soft and low voice and tone and when he did speak he spoke the truth. His wisdom,

kindness, fairness, caring for people and other noble virtues had a great influence on people around. As a result, Muslims subconsciously adopt such ethical influence techniques as imitating the ethical Prophet, ethics hint and obedience, which played an important role in promoting harmony and stability of Islamic societies.

Islamic ethics realizes its social functions by adjusting people's behavior through encouragement or persuasion. Islam forbids laughing at each other and requires Muslims to take initiative to greet each other with due courtesy. The Prophet Muhammad said to his followers, "Watch what you say and how you say it. Otherwise, the tongue will throw you into the hell fire which is as deep as the distance between Heaven and Earth. You have control of your words before you say them. Once you have said the words, you are under their control. You must watch your tongue. Perhaps one word my deprive you of your happiness and lead to disasters." When reading the *Quran*, you can easily notice a lot of advising sayings and warning sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Besides warning people against following their own inclinations, he also advised people to cultivate the virtue of charity first and avoid vices like weltering in luxury and pleasure, bullying and reaping benefits at the expense of others. He believed that ethics is of great social significance, taking it to be the basis for the existence, development and growth of the Islamic nation, the essence of humanity and, in particular, where the value of life lies. Only when social ethics gets improved and the level of ethics reaches a certain point can the life quality and living environment of Muslims be enhanced. Therefore, everyone must behave himself and keep on enriching and improving himself. If so, people can live in harmony, an individual can integrate into society and the society will become orderly and harmonious. The principles and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad on interpersonal relationships and ethical cultivation have been of guidance and education significance for Muslims and have been beneficial to social stability.

II. Coordinating the Relations between Individual Muslims and Society

An individual cannot be separated from society for an individual is a member of society and a society is made up of individuals. Therefore, an individual is in close ties with society. Under the control of society, an individual must take his social responsibilities and obligations within the realm of society. Once separated from society or the collective, an individual loses his qualifications of a social member. In that case, he does not need to take any responsibility yet also loses all the rights of a social member. The restriction of society upon individuals has become a must and in many cases an individual must obey social ethics unconditionally. The goals of an ethical society and an ethical individual are in complete accord so disputes, if any, between them can be coordinated and the ethical life of an individual must be set on the social arena. In other words, the relationship between society and an individual can be summed up as the society "both restrains and encourages an individual, going beyond individuals while existing within individuals"(Li, 2008:295).

The implementation of Islamic ethics is the unity of social coordination and self-examination and the unity of heteronomy and self-discipline. Good governance in a society does not only concern the guarantee of rights and the fulfillment of responsibilities; proper interpersonal relationships also mean safeguarding human dignity and caring for others. Islam has been valuing the sociality of religion. Laws are aimed at regulating the behavior of believers and the relations between them. For instance, the *Quran* is the most authoritative law for Muslims. The full expression of Islamic ethics in society demonstrates the continuous integration of the individuality and sociality of religion. In regard to the sociality of religion, the institutionalization of religion guarantees and maintains the embodiment and institutionalization of personal beliefs in a stable system. Take Christianity for example, although the tension between the individuality and the sociality of religion, which competed and fought against each other, existed all along its development of this religion, the origin and development of the canon law was an appeal of the sociality of Christianity along with the development of the

tension (Ren, 1999:105). Learning from the development of Christianity, Islam deals with the relationship between individuality and sociality perfectly. Individuals and the society can develop in relative harmony or in an interactive and institutionalized relation. As to its sociality, this system promotes the implementation of the holy missions in history and social activities. Meanwhile, its rigid religion institutions can guarantee the coordination and interaction between individuals and society.

The enlightenment of Islamic ethics is of vital importance for the coordination of the relations between social members. As the spirit that constitutes the inner nature of man, ethics plays an important role in the mental structure of man. It is the perfect combination of the will power, reason and feelings of man. One important research subject of Islamic ethics is the problem of "good and evil". Classic writers in the world history of thought often discussed ethics or the theory of good in different fields, senses or at different levels. "Generally speaking, the first type defines the good or the idea of the good in the sense of the noumenal world like Plato and the divine command theory; the second type defines the good or ethical imperatives in the sense of the order noumenon in human society like Kant, Hegel and Confucianism; the third type defines the nature of the good in the sense of human ethics, which can also be called the noumenon theory of human ethics, like Aristotle (who uses the double meanings of ethics) and MacIntyre" (Ge, 1999). The third type focuses on human virtues and the Islamic ethics discussed here belong to this type as a whole. The Islamic ethics advocated by the Prophet Muhammad does not only involve social, political, economic and legal fields but also concerns the fulfillment of human ethics and the good governance of the society and the state. "Ethics and the values, personality ideals, rules, choice and judgment mechanisms contained in ethics are particular important elements in this organic system" (Fu & Huang, 1987:146). It is one of the important factors that constitute to social civilization.

In pursuing human ethics and justice, an Islamic society restricts the behavior of individuals for the sake of the wholeness of the society. As a product of people's practice of social ethics, once it comes into

being, becomes objective conditions that confine people's activities or a part of the social environment. In many cases, an individual must obey social ethics. Whether an individual's ethics is strong or not is completely determined by social education and restrictions on him. People in different societies have some basic values in common. For instance, they all regard such behavior like murder, suicide, corruption, bribery, rape and abortion as crimes. Moreover, the family is the basic unit of a society. "The majority of people in most societies has a similar 'sense of ethics', i.e., the minimum level of ethics about right and wrong. If this is the real meaning of universal civilization, it is both fundamental and vital" (Huntington, 1998: 43). The fact that people have similar basic values proves that universal value is an eternal value of mankind. To meet with the need of establishing a humanitarian ethical relation and a social environment that provides inner harmony, people demand more care and a solid humanitarian atmosphere, in which they treat others with a mind-set of self-perfection and expect in return the same treatment from others.

The extraordinary enlightenment function of Islamic ethics has elevated the reputation of Islam. In social practice, religious beliefs, ethics and morality have been internalized into the code of conduct of Muslims, adding new practical values to Islam's social coordination function. "Ethics refers to ideas about good and evil, right and wrong, feelings and habits developed in people's social practice and a regulatory system that improves and coordinates the interpersonal relations and the relationship between nature and man by relying on the public opinion and conscience-guided personality" (Wei, 2001:32-33). The definition of ethics determines the essence, aspects, characteristics, judgment measures, roles and functions of ethics. As a system in social phenomena, ethics includes ethical awareness, relations and practice, three aspects interacting with each other in reciprocal causation, mutual interpenetration and promotion. As a result, all ethical phenomena are related in organic links and are always changing. As the Islamic ethical system is authoritative, stable, reasonable and massive and social ethics and individual ethics is complementary, the society can maintain long-term and stable

development. The practice of social ethics, after all, depends on the practice of individual ethics, that is to say, social ethics must be in accord with individual needs and the ethical level that individuals can possibly reach. The ethical practice of any individual is always under the influence of the economic, cultural, educational and ethical situations of the society. In other words, the socialization of a person requires that he must abide by the requirements of social ethics. Every Muslim was born in an established ethical relation, which would show his motive, ideas and conscience in activities concerning personal, collective and social interests. Ethical actions would be praised while unethical actions would be condemned.

III. Taking on Social Responsibilities and Duties

As many know, the Islamic ethical order demonstrates itself in the form of freedom, equality, and justice, etc.. What is more important, it reflects the value pursuit of Muslims. They desire to live in an orderly environment and ethical standards are a product of such value pursuit. Therefore, ethics has an inherent idea of order. It is widely used in social life as a common social coordination measure so as to help maintain the continuity and stability of society.

Muslims attach great significance to their belief of "two worlds". They believe that they will see what they have done in their life on Judgment Day so they have a special love for ethical order. As "ethics-order-salvation" has become an internal logic in Muslim societies, Muslims pay much attention to their ethical practice. In Islamic culture, ethics is given much social significance by religious beliefs. According to cognitive psychology, out of their awe of Allah, Muslims, with rather complicated psychological implications, unconditionally obey and believe in the arrangement of Allah. "And if the people of the townships had believed and kept from evil, surely we should have opened for them blessings from the sky and from the earth. But (unto every messenger) they gave the lie, and so we seized them on account of what they used to earn"(Ma, 2003:9:7:96). It means those who do not hold Allah in awe or those who are no doers of good

will be punished with disasters, poverty and sufferings. Even if someone does unethical things when he is alone; he is still under the restriction and judgment of ethics. There is almost no such a private space where people can stay away from ethics.

Moral cultivation is a process in which Muslims change the objective environment outside as well as their mental world inside. The realm of moral cultivation involves a wide range of contents. "Moral realm actually refers to the position of moral subjects on the moral ladder or the degree of their moral consciousness and so on. To reach the ideal realm of morality is a token of moral regulations having been internalized into moral consciousness and a token of moral cultivation realizing its ultimate purpose. Therefore, one must talk about moral realm whenever he talks about moral cultivation"(Li & Mao, 2003:309). The awareness of abiding by social morality, punishing evil-doers and praising good-doers reminds Muslims that following the Islam canon is a religious service of pious believers, which can coordinate social conflicts, reduce interpersonal stress and improve social conduct. If everyone insists on doing good things, not bad things, and treats others with care and kindness, the society will certainly become so harmonious that people are friendly to each other. In a good ethical environment, people can live in good order, carry out friendly exchanges, enjoy their surroundings and, to sum up, live and work in peace and contentment. The advantages of Islam's ethical functions are evident. Apart from being able to coordinate social conflicts, it is also a cradle that nurtures the spirit of Muslims.

During their ethical practice in social life, Muslims need to improve their morals and enhance their social relations and relations with others for interpersonal relationships have been a constant thread winding its way through social life and individuals are in the center of social network. An individual should be responsible for himself as well as for the society, which proves that ethical practice is of great social significance. The moral behavior of Muslims is under the control of their moral accomplishment, feelings and consciousness while the establishment of ethical codes is determined by the society and influenced by social practice, including such factors as politics,

economy, law, culture and social psychology. Therefore, to some degree, ethics gradually comes into being in practice. Of course, Islamic ethics is not unchangeable. Its concepts, range, structure and content change along with the time and the needs of the time.

Ideals are the soul of morality. Moral order always leads a society to an idealistic level at which people live together on good terms, the social order is stable and people pursue lofty spiritual values. Although different eras in history had different moral orders, the historical continuity of moral development and the needs of the common interests of human society determined the existence of some common spiritual notions like justice, order and interests (Li, 2008:7) .The ethical system in Islam theories proves that Islam is a lofty religion and a religion beneficial for the subsistence of mankind. In a sense, moral order is a product of interest relations for interests are the foundation of morality and the handling of interest relations appears as a moral order. "The ethical theory of Islam centers on doing good deeds. Ethics plays an important part in Islam in that it protects the pure beliefs of Muslims"(Center of Islamic Studies, 1991:140). The survival concept faces a dilemma: on the one hand it must face the secularity of social life; on the other hand, it must believe the illusive wonder described by religious theories. These beliefs and value judgments cannot possibly avoid contradictions. However, the ethics advocated by Islam, as great social and spiritual wealth, has won the hearts of people and internalized into ideology, quality, thinking and habits of Muslims. It has been nourishing hearts and feelings of Muslims and cleaning up the living environment of Islamic societies. As a spiritual pillar which Muslims rely on for subsistence and the hope of a happy life for Muslims, Islamic ethics is capable of spiritual coordination. Losing its ethics would be a huge loss of any Islamic society that wants to be a wholesome society. The above analysis of standards of ethics leads us to the conclusion that ethics is a criterion of value judgment and its sociality determines its noticeable role in the daily life of Muslims.

During the transformation from traditional to modern societies, the tough Islamic ethics continues to exist and has shown a

characteristic of the time, namely, advancing with the times while bringing forth new ideas, which means Islamic ethics is fit for different social orders. With the same social foundations, Islamic ethics and modern laws have much in common. This stimulates the integration and infiltration of ethics into modern society and law, revealing the legitimation tendency and the social significance of Islamic ethics. In social life, every Muslim needs to observe the law and, what's more important, ethics. To abide by ethics, one must, above all, abide by the law. One must pay attention to both ethics and the law. Moral mentality is an underlying factor determining the existence of morality and the reflection and accumulation of moral requirements on the mind. Moral psychology exists as moral cognition, emotions, willpower, beliefs, thinking, habits and so on. Its substantive contents include the sense of responsibility, obligation, honor, justice, happiness, etc (Li, 2008:183). In the system of social ethics, core values contained in Islamic morality like equality, fairness, justice, freedom and order manifest the ideals and goals of mankind when governing the society. These values have become an important standard to evaluate social responsibilities and duties of Muslims. Meanwhile, they keep a rein on the behavior approaches of Muslims or even the overall social culture.

IV. Islamic Ethics as a Spiritual Power for the Muslims in Their Subsistence

An Islamic society is a society with Islamic culture at its core while ethics plays an important role in Islamic culture. That "Allah is the only God" is a spiritual power in Islamic ethics; the spiritual power is both an important part of religious faith and a principle of personal cultivation. Islam brings ethics into religious faith so as to strengthen ethics in practice, which gives morality and moral behaviors special meanings and domains. For Muslims, mortal life must be spent around religious faith and their awe of Allah is a spiritual power in their subsistence.

A. Islamic Moral Cognition Based on Awe of Allah

The most distinctive characteristic of Islamic culture if the belief that "Allah is the only God." Islamic ethics has, above all, a principle of sanctity or the awe of Allah, which is literally the code of conduct. This principle is regarded by Muslims as a moral duty and a law, which has become the most important content and spiritual pillar in Islamic ethics. The cultivation of awe of Allah in daily life brings about among Muslims an awe of Islamic ethics. When creating the Islamic society, Muhammad gave a rather high social status to Islamic ethics. Happiness of mankind, he said, "lies in good morality while misfortune of mankind is a result of moral decay. I was sent by Allah to improve the morality of mankind. There are two ways to improve ethics: one is to believe that Allah is the only God and the other is to increase personal ethical cultivation" (See the *Hadith*).

Moral consciousness refers to social psychological factors and ethical consciousness developed by individuals in ethical practice. Moral consciousness is, first of all, faith, which is mainly reflected in the insistence on observing the system of social norms and customs. Islamic ethics and religious theories have close ties. Islamic theology is the ideological source for establishing social norms and order while the religious life and behaviors of Muslims must be under the guidance of the theological system. During the early development of Islam, religion had a strong influence on the whole society and its social function was to a large content based on ethics. Religious belief systems, rituals, abstinence and punishment must be conducted with Islamic ethics as the standard.

Islamic ethics has three major principles: the first is to do good and forbid evil; the second is equality and mercy and the third is self-awareness and helping others improve their morality while improving one's own morality. The motive of the establishment of the ethical code of conduct in Islamic societies is to safeguard the stability of social order. Generally speaking, a social member must accept the universal norms of ethics. One purpose of ethics is to bring into play its subjectivity and arrange, coordinate and standardize the order of Muslims' daily life in a normative way. Due to the extensive and public practice of morality in daily life, when people take the initiative

to arrange and regulate their behavior, this self-conscious moral behavior becomes an objective social regulation force which provides society with a widely and orderly adopted framework of behavior.

In social life, the foundation of legislation, ethical implications of the law, ethical requirements in jurisdiction, basis of law-abiding and so on are all closely related to Islamic ethics. In other words, law has gone further into a broader cultural background, where it must accept the review, judgment and criticism of ethics. In moral life, all social values must guide people's behavior in accordance with ethical norms. To some degree, the boundaries between the ethical practice, thinking and legal regulations have long been changed or shifted and it is actually difficult to tell one from the other.

One of the most outstanding contributions of Islamic theology to society is its service to real social life. It combines the once secular ethical behavior closely with theology and places secular behavior under the regulation of religious norms or holy regulations. As most know, ethics is meant to coordinate interpersonal relations. Once integrated into the theological system, it is elevated to the level of adjusting the relationship between man and God, which reflects the wisdom of channeling Islamic ethics into society, that is, bringing into play the deterrence of the theological system.

B. Islamic Ethics as the Mainstream Consciousness of Society

To create a harmonious social environment, any society needs some kind of coordinating force, which is exactly the role that Islamic ethics plays in society. Islamic thoughts like equality, justice, morality, doing good, mercy, charity, loyalty and caring for others are all levers for coordinating social relations and conflicts. Likewise, Islamic beliefs, notions and emotions are also coordinating tools. Wholesome morality, as the psychological wealth of an individual, is not useful enough even after turning into ethical behavior of individuals. It does not have a practical value until it has been used to influence society and it will not be of any significance in creating a harmonious society until then. When individual ethical behavior works in every aspect of society, it can make the style of the general social ethics change and create a living environment with a relatively ethical order.

Islamic ethics is of programmatic and directing significance for regulating the social order. As a social factor that requires it to be implemented in practice by social members, it is also an important measure for the ruler to regulate the people and the social order. Ethical norms and principles are a product of social material conditions. Only with shared ethical values and a code of conduct can a society operate normally and the people can carry out exchanges smoothly. In order to maintain a dynamic balance of social life and the normal operation of society, some ethical norms must be established to condition or regulate people's behavior. Islamic ethics is not only a type of heteronomy but more of self-discipline. It lays a solid foundation for social development by internalizing heteronomy into the self-discipline of the people.

Out of the needs of the coexistence of social groups, ethical norms must resolve the multiple relations between individuals, between individuals and social groups, and adjust the mutual relations between various internal factors within the social structure in time. Islamic ethical norms require the people to pursue poetic justice. The religious practice of Islam is a process of self-discipline and self-perfection throughout one's life, the beliefs and power of which is apparently helpful for the stability of the social order. As a matter of fact, for Muslims, Islam is a religion of strong national self-discipline and discipline. Islamic ethics is widely used in social life as the mainstream consciousness so as to create a harmonious humanitarian environment. Endowed with a cultural spirit, its values are highly thought of by Muslims.

To judge a person's morality, the established ethical norms provide a specific standard, that is, judging people by good or evil, right or wrong and reasonable or not. Generally speaking, there is a clear division between good and evil so that ethical judgment is a kind of duty judgment. One can clearly understand the ethical norms and develop or shape his morals and ideological consciousness in his ethical practice. Therefore, moral consciousness, ideals, judgment and quality are bound to observe the standard and guidance of Islamic morality. Embodied in the regulatory system of social customs, ethical

relations and practice become rather useful social customs, coordinating people's behavior by virtue of the power of public opinion, customs and inner beliefs. Personal morality and social morality is equally important, the elevation of personal morality can uplift the social morality and vice versa.

The whole Islamic social system is based on Islamic doctrines: union of politics and religion, union of religion and social ethics, union of thearchy and secularity, and union of religion and secularity. As a result, secular ethics and religious ethics are combined, one within another. Therefore, it is not surprising that Islamic ethics is seen in every aspect of social life. The traditional thinking of Islamic ethics has an influence on people's judgment about most things. In real social life, although Islamic ethics does not have law coerciveness, it has public opinion coerciveness, the pressure of which has an unequaled force for regulating people's behavior.

In a society with Islamic ethics as the mainstream consciousness, morality is a spiritual pillar of law while law is a power pillar of ethics. The law is a product of the enforcement, embodiment and institutionalization of basic ethical principles while morality is the self-conscious conduct of the people. To a large degree, Muslims train their willpower because of the awareness as well as the restriction of the law and morality. "Ethics is a code of conduct developed in the production and social practice of mankind aimed at coordinating various relations. It is a necessity for social groups to co-exist"(Yang, 2002:67). A stable Islamic order plays a vital role in coordinating social relations and it helps maintain the security of politics and the social system. As a continuous and stable social factor, Islamic ethics maintains and strengthens, to a large degree, the life of religion and exists as a spiritual power for the subsistence of Muslims. No doubt it is an important factor helpful for the stability and progression of society. Since it can guarantee the smooth operation of social life, its positive significance for society is apparent.

V. Conclusion

After studying how Islamic ethics coordinate social relations, we notice that Islamic ethics played an important part in coordinating the social relations of Islamic countries in the Middle East in history and, considering the fact that it provides theoretical support for coordinating social conflicts in modern society, it is still of great social value today. Here we want to make a few remarks on the political unrest in the West Asia and North Africa. The profound influence of the political unrest which happened in the Middle East and North Africa late in 2010 and early in 2011 goes far beyond the prediction of the world. Some compared the political influence of the unrest in the Middle East to that of the drastic change in Eastern Europe in 1989 and some compared its political and historical significance to the national liberation movement in the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s. Whether this kind of comparison is appropriate, we all agree on one thing, namely, this incident, which involves many countries in the Middle East, will exert wide-spread and long-lasting influence on world politics. Yet as the unrest is still developing there, we need more time before we can make objective and proper analysis about it.

The on-going political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa is under the influence of history, religion, culture and society. There are both internal and external reasons for it. According to materialistic dialectics, external causes are the condition of change and internal causes the basis of change, external causes becoming operative through internal causes. After all, the political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa is basically an internal affair and the internal causes are the root causes. When studying the causes of the political unrest in the Middle East, we notice that there are many severe and troublesome problems in societies of the Middle East and North Africa. For example, in politics, they need reform and restructuring; in economics, they need improvement of the living conditions of the people. In particular, problems like the high unemployment rate, high inflation rate, income distribution imbalance and corruption among senior officials call for an urgent resolution. It should be noted that, facing the above-mentioned discord in the Middle East and North Africa, the theory of harmony advocated by Islamic ethics remains

unchanged and its important attribution to the stability of society has not changed, either. The Middle East countries need the driving force of Islamic ethics and the Islamic spirit is of great importance for the integration of the people. No matter how the Middle East societies change, their Islamic values will always remain the same.

In the final analysis, the ongoing political unrest in the Middle East is basically a spontaneous and bottom-up revolution of the people. The main reason why it has spread to many Arab countries and causes drastic turmoil in the politics and societies of these countries lies in the complex intrinsic social problems. Arab people appealed for better living conditions in the first place and now the key to the unrest is a reform in politics and the social system. In a word, this is an overall political crisis triggered by a series of livelihood issues.

The lasting upheaval and war in Libya reminds people across the world of the severity of peace and war in the Middle East. Under the banner of the UN Security Council, the US and NATO, two external forces, have transformed internal affairs of Libya into a war against Libya. They made it clear that the purpose of this war was to overthrow Gaddafi, which has happened with his death in October, 2011 and both are fighting in Libya today. In my view, Middle East countries should reflect deeply on the current situation. "Peace, Not War" is the call of the people in the Middle East and North Africa. We are sorry to say that peace might return to the Middle East earlier if there were no intervention of external military forces.

It has long been a guiding principle universally recognized in the international community that in international relations, all countries, big or small, should be equals and internal affairs of a country should be resolved by the people themselves. By no means should external forces use their military force to intervene in the internal affairs of a state. The political unrest in Libya is totally an internal affair which should only be resolved by the Libyan people themselves instead of the US and NATO, who tried to overthrow Gaddafi by launching a war like what the US did to Saddam Hussein's Iraq regime in 2003. This war has been a blatant intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. Showing no respect to the sovereignty, territorial integrity

and independence of Libya, it is a typical hegemonic activity that goes beyond the authorization of the United Nations Security Council.

The political and social development of Arab countries in West Asia and North Africa is at a new crossroads and its future development tendency depends on the political wisdom of the new generation of leaders. Undoubtedly, these countries in the region are going through a period of social transformation. However, the people are not fully prepared for political or economic reform. Moreover, the task of improving the living conditions of the people is really difficult to complete in the near future. All in all, we must be aware that the impact of this political unrest on the Arab world will be ever-lasting.

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