

Custom and Law: A Study of “An Kooli” in the Qing Empire

LU Chih-Chun^{*}

In November 1787, the Qianlong emperor announced an edict on changing the word for “custom” in the Manchu language from “an kooli” to “geren i tacin.” The replacement of the word also altered the concept of custom in Manchu from an “ordinary norm” to the “practice of a large group of people.” However, since records relating to this event are rare, it is hard for researchers to demonstrate why the Qianlong emperor decided to do this. This event was probably related to the standardization of translation between the Manchu and Chinese languages during the Qianlong period; additionally, it also reflected the relationship between “law” and “custom” in the Qing empire. This article principally examines the official archives and publications of the Qing dynasty in order to analyze the meaning of “an kooli” at different times, and discusses further the changing translation of “custom” in the Manchu language. As will be shown, the translation of “custom” in the Manchu language went through different phases of change. Comprehending this process of change not only helps researchers understand better how the Qing emperors interpreted “custom”, but also to reflect on the subtle interactions among “custom,” “Confucian rites,” and “law” in the Qing empire.

Keywords: Custom, law, Manchu language, Qing empire, legal pluralism

* Ph.D. candidate, Department of History, National Taiwan University