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WU Yan (Inner Mongolia Normal University, China)

The Replacement of Traditional Ceremonies in the Process of the Movement for “Abolishing the Traditional Calendar and Promoting the National Calendar”: Focusing on the Memorial Day of the Birth of Confucius

Abstract – On January 1st, 1912, the Republic of China was founded. At the presidential inauguration, SunYat-sen, the temporary President, announced the adoption of a calendar that used the founding of the Republic as the calendar starting point and the principle of the Gregorian calendar, namely, a solar calendar, arguing that a calendar of this type had been adopted broadly by "advanced" western countries. However, because of the close relation between a calendar and everyday life and customs, the new calendar could not immediately replace the common one, shortly after being promulgated. In 1927, the National Government took power in Nanjing; in the following year, the government initiated a movement named “abolishing the traditional calendar and promoting the national calendar.” This movement established the calendric system, with a starting point at the Republican era and a Gregorian calendric rule, as the “National Calendar”. At the time, the dates of Chinese traditional festivals and series of Commemorative Days were officially transferred from the traditional calendar to the Gregorian calendar, at fixed days in the latter calendar. For instance, the Memorial Day of the Birth of Confucius was set up as an official festival and its date was transferred from the traditional calendar to the Gregorian calendar on August 27 of each year. However, contemporary researchers determined the Memorial Day for the Birth of Confucius with another procedure. This procedure relied on the luni-solar Chinese calendar, and then converted the day obtained into the newly established calendar. Their results were not accepted by the government. This discrepancy sheds light on how

different procedures for computing days for rituals reflect different notions of time. This constitutes a typical case in which the government reconstructed a tradition according to the new order of time. By replacing the date and regulating the ritual, the government re-interpreted the traditional cultural meaning of Confucius and this commemorative day. In contrast to this, the government completely rejected the traditional calendar, referring to it as an “abolished calendar” and claiming that “the fact that one continues to use the old calendar means he carries out the calendar promulgated by Tsing Dynasty, so that he would be the rebel of the Republic of China”. This negative description of traditional calendar and construction of Confucius symbol seem to be contradictory; in essence, however, their aims are both to reconstruct some order of time, through which the government aimed to distinguish itself clearly from the former dynasty and to justify itself. By doing so, the Gregorian calendar as an element of a foreign culture represented an approach to establish the new order of time and also reconstruct a tradition. Meanwhile, by placing the “tradition” into the new order of time, the foreign culture became a part of local culture.