Emperor Shown in Biography

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"Aural documentation" is a principal method of collecting materials folklore study. In any "aural documentation", the experience of the speaker and orally-transmitted stories are blended more or less indistinguishably. The greater the proportion of orally transmitted material, the more likely it is to be handled as folklore phenomenon. In other words, folklore has tried, in this literate world, to document historical materials from a "huge world without letters", by excluding personal experiences from "aural documentation", except when these experiences themselves were folklore phenomena (for example, a folklore religion).

As an example of experience which is not itself folklore, we can mention the Japanese imperial system (Tennou-Sei), or a pollution, which is closely involved with actual social problems. However, dividing so-called "oral history" into the history of personal experience and orally transmitted history, may be meaningless. This meaninglessness is especially embodied in its most concentrated form, in the biography, which describes the life of an individual person. If we go to extremes, it is even possible to discover a folklore in an experience which does not include a handed-down tradition. It may be supposed that a problem involving the folklore of the Japanese imperial system is of this kind. It is really folklore to abstract the imperial system from common people (people of "the world which does not use letters" in the literate society), and it isn't really folklore to see a folklore feature in the history of the imperial system.

In the process of hearing the life history of a person, the existence of a certain mountain village was made clear, and it was found that the "Go-Shinei" (photograph of the Japanese Emperor, Tennou), embodiment of the ideology of the the imperial system before the end of World War II, is not distributed to the remote mountain village. On the basis of this finding, I want to point out the importance of the "Tennou as shown in folk-lore" from the viewpoint of folklore study. Just as YANAGITA Kunio asked, "what will become of the Ie (family)? What should become of it?" in his "Story of Ances-tors" at the end of the war, and sorrowfully expressed the necessity of collecting "some facts" on the Ie, the folklore must now provide us with "some facts" on the imperial system.