Folklore in the Society of Reproduction Technique
—Examples in Modern City of Kanazawa—

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How the Japanese view of their nacestors’ soul has changed in these days when there are more and more households without ancestral tablets nor Buddhist altars, in particular in urban life? Instead, pictures of late persons are becoming more and more popular, which can be grasped as a characteristic phenomenon. In early years of our modernization, the pictures as portraits thus firmly established among the Japanese who had an idea that our soul can be transmitted from generation to generation through pictured portraits to eternity. The same idea could be had through photographed images when the technique first appeared in Japan.

On the other hand the family album produced a new folkloric culture where people think they can record the history of their family by means of photos in handing orally down the anecdotes concerning the photographed persons. At the skirt of Utatsuyama near Kanazawa, the famous castle town, there exists a Nichiren-Sect Temple, Sinjo-Ji, which is called “Kishi-Bojin” more popularly. This Kishi-Bojin is “Hairi”, goddess of children where people are accustomed to dedicate some photographed portraits.

The Buddhist temple now holds about two thousand sheets of photos developed on paper support, among which the oldest traces up to 1977 which represent a soldier. On the reverse side of this photo, it is inscribed “Sin-Ei” (true portrait). In 1960 a photography office was established on the hill of the Utatsuyama, which was one of the earliest photo studios in Japan. Though people at that time was putting the photographing under taboo considering that when photographed their soul was taken away into another world, the class of bushi (Japanese millitary) and the “Geisha” liked to be photographed. This is a phenomenon worthy of note.

The first newspaper published in Kanazawa was the “Kaika Shinbun” (1971). Then, a little later, colored woodblock print, the “Nishikie” became popular as
a new visual information medium as was the case in Tokyo and Osaka. The nishikie, which represented war and battles as the newest events in early days of Meiji era charmed people since differently from a mere rumor they were full of reality with vivid colored images. On the other hand the “hikifuda”, handbill or circular was sold over the counter. Because they represented such Japanese favorite gods and goddesses as “Sichi-Fukujin” (the Seven Deities of Good Fortune) “Ota-Fuku”, “Fuku-Suke” (a big-headed dwarf believed to bring luck), “Takara-Bune” (treasure ship), people were fond of them as “engi-mono”, namely good omen. The “hikifuda” or circulars at the early days of Meiji era represented for the most part such western-styled objects as steam locomotives, rikisha, lamp, derby hats and watches which were, for the Japanese, a sort of symbol of the westernization. This implies that many shops promptly tried to emphasize the fact that they had already been westernized. The commercialism, represented mainly by the hikifuda up until 1882 or 1883 (published by diverse enterprises) then shifted into the newspaper which became major journalism in gradually increasing their circulation. Thus the printing became major advertising medium and spread like a wildfire as cheap, mass-produced commodity. YANAGITA Kunio points out, in his “Study on Seken-Banashi” (this means Japanese style small talks among familiar persons), that for a long time the Japanese people in general only believed what they saw or heard directly. For them what they knew indirectly could not be put into the category of experience.

The printing technique, which belongs to the reproduction culture, led to so-called imitation culture leading to more fashionable society. This is largely depending upon the coownership of visual information. What is important in conclusion is that with the progress of equalization and democratization of social information, the life conscience of Japanese people would have changed by large.