

Hanayome Noren: Vibrant Symbols of a Family's Love

On the Noto Peninsula, brightly colored *noren* curtains with auspicious motifs have long been a symbol of a bride's transition to a new life. Until the mid-twentieth century, arranged marriages were the norm. The wedding was usually a small ceremony held at the groom's home to welcome the bride to her new family. The bride's mother prepared a decorative *hanayome noren* (bridal curtain), for the ceremony. It was hung in the groom's home for the wedding, typically between the living room and the Buddhist altar room, where the marriage ceremony took place. The curtain was a symbol of the affection of the bride's family and the threshold to her new life.

Hopes for a happy future

The *hanayome noren* was made as part of the bride's wedding trousseau of clothing and furnishings delivered to the groom's family home before the wedding. It was often designed in celebratory colors such as red, pink, and blue, with auspicious motifs such as cranes to represent long life, pairs of mandarin ducks to symbolize a happy union, as well as images representing the bride's hometown. The bride's family crest was featured at the top of the curtain; the last time she would use it.

The bride's mother designed the curtain with her daughter in mind. The bride first saw the curtain as she walked through it, into the altar room to officially join her husband's family. This one-of-a-kind curtain served as a tangible expression of her mother's love and hopes for her daughter's future happiness. It would be displayed for visitors to the groom's home for a few days after the wedding, then carefully packed away in a drawer, never to be used again.

The tradition started in the late Edo period (1603–1867) and was widely practiced in the Noto, Kaga, and Etchu provinces (present-day Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures) until the mid-twentieth century. The curtains were typically made from cotton, but the most lavish were made of silk, with intricate motifs rendered in Kaga *yuzen*, a resist-dye technique that developed in the region in the seventeenth century. The multi-step process of Kaga *yuzen* dyeing requires a high degree of skill, applying delicate linework and shading effects by hand. The curtain could take up to six months to make.

Crossing the threshold to a new life

The permanency of a bride's transition to her new family was marked by a ceremony at the entrance to the groom's family home before the marriage ceremony. The bride would mix water from the two households and sip it from a ceramic dish. The dish was then smashed as a gesture that she was leaving her old life behind. For the ceremony, the bride wore a white *shiromoku* wedding kimono, another symbol of starting afresh.

Stepping through the curtain bearing her family crest and motifs from her hometown, the bride left her old life behind. She would then approach the altar to announce herself to her new family's ancestors before the marriage ceremony began.

Curtains for grooms

While most curtains were for brides, a *hanamuko noren* (groom's curtain) was made when a man was adopted into his wife's family. In families with only daughters, a son-in-law might take his wife's name in order to continue her family line. Designs for grooms tended toward cool colors and masculine motifs such as fearsome hawks to represent strength and power, Japanese carp to symbolize overcoming obstacles, and pine trees to represent longevity and steadfastness.

Changing design trends

The designs of *hanayome noren* were dictated by the bride's preference while following the fashion trends of the era. The curtains of the late Edo period and Meiji era (1868–1912) were usually printed on cotton, with imagery representing longevity and good fortune. Tortoise and crane motifs were common.

From the twentieth century to the present day, the curtains became more elaborate. Fabrics changed from cotton to silk, and Kaga *yuzen* dyeing methods were used to make intricate patterns and images with contemporary appeal such as seasonal flowers, or well-known scenery. From 1945, brighter colors became common, as chemical dyes allowed more vivid colors.

The revival of a faded art

From the 1970s, weddings evolved, moving from private ceremonies held in homes to elaborate productions staged at hotels. The transition from the bride's family to her in-laws' lost its sense of gravity as more women joined the workforce and gained economic independence. The popularity of the curtains faded, and families ceased to make them when their daughters left home to marry. Interest in these curtains has seen a

resurgence in recent years. In 2004, storekeepers along Ipponsugi Dori shopping street in Nanao began exhibiting their family curtains during the annual Golden Week holidays in May. In 2016, Hanayome Norenkan was opened just off the shopping street to display bridal curtains year-round. Some families on the Noto Peninsula continue to use *hanayome noren* as a way to honor past traditions, albeit without the original sense of finality of cutting family ties by the bride.