

“Noren in Edo” by KOIZUMI Kazuko

Noren is a well-noted symbol of Edo merchants as marked in the restored model. The way of hanging a screen at the entrance of a store to separate it from the outside world had long been put into practice which was the original form of Noren. In the Heian period, screens were used in the homes of aristocrats called Shinden-style house (the palace style of Heian period architecture), as the partition which later developed into the original form of Noren bringing its design gradually into sophistication. The term ‘Noren’ was first observed in the Muromachi period used as a screen at the entrance of a temple for Zen study. The present style of Noren emerged when such an entrance screen showed the effect of a signboard. It was due to the economy being activated in the 1600s, but the designs were simple. It was in the 1700s when colourfully designed Noren emerged. On the other hand, elaborately designed Noren came to be used inside the theatres and was distinguished from others by being called ‘Uchinoren’ (Noren for the interior). Noren won its status as the symbol of business at merchants’ shops, while small-sized Noren made with rope called Nawanoren also came into use at small restaurants like taverns or

saloons where sake was served. This created a local scene as well those days. Another type of Noren also emerged in Edo at the beginning of the 1800s : A short in length but wide Noren attached along a stick was fixed outside of a stretched-out, arcade-shaped eave at the entrance of a shop. There, Noren did no longer play the role of screen but did that of a substantial wall. This tactful measure was an inevitable outcome of necessity having to make as many shops as possible on a narrow ground originally planned to build the road. This stirs the imagination that there could have been a different characteristic on building up a city in Edo from that in Kyoto.