

Menko Corner

The Dagashiya and the Lottery

by Ryan Laughton

Ask any elderly Japanese person about dagashiya and they will usually recount a tale of their favorite snack or a special dagashiya they would frequent in their childhood. Dagashiya means "Cheap Sweets Store" and is basically an old fashioned penny candy store. Unfortunately, dagashiya are on the decline in Japan, but they still can be found here and there and when you do run across one it's always worth a look inside; especially when you are on the hunt for sumo menko.

During the menko era from the 1930s-1960s, menko manufacturers would sell their menko products in dagashiya because this was the gathering place for the main buyers of their menko--- schoolkids. It would work something like this. First, a particular company would print out a set of menko, wrap each individual menko in a handmade newspaper envelope and then string 100 or so packs together with a string and form what is known as a taba pack. About 7 or so random menko in these taba packs would be stamped with a number 1, 2 or 3 winner stamp on the back. The manufacturing company would then package a prize sheet and uncut sheets of menko along with the taba pack and sell it to dagashiya wholesalers. Dagashiya owners would then make their supply runs to these wholesalers and buy their stock of sweets as well as pick-up any taba packs that they might need or feel that they can sell. The most popular theme for menko at the time were baseball, sumo and various anime characters. Once back at the dagashiya, the owners would take the prize sheet from

the taba pack and hang it up in the store. Most often the uncut sheets of menko were glued to the prize sheet at the factory, but some had to be glued at the dagashiya. Glue residue is quite common on many menko that survive today. The prize sheet would normally have 1-#1 prize, 2-#2 prizes and 4-#3 prizes. Usually the #1 prize would be a "supersized" menko of a popular yokozuna of the time of a sheet of 16 uncut menko from the set. A typical #2 prize would be an uncut sheet of 4 or 8 menko and a typical #3 prize would usually be a pair of uncut menko. The final process was for the owner to hang the taba pack from the ceiling by the string where kids would pay about 1 yen to pull an envelope from the pack. If they opened the envelope and pulled a winner menko, they would get the corresponding prize according to their winner stamp.



Pictures 1 and 2: Typical taba pack- front and back



Picture 3: prize sheet example

There were several other ways manufacturers packaged menko besides taba packs. The second most common way was to wrap 3-4 menko in a fine tissue paper and then package them in boxes. Random winner menko were inserted as well and the most common prizes for boxed menko were uncut sheets as they could be packaged easily inside the box with the other menko. The earliest form of packaging were sheets of menko where children would "pop" out the menko. This allowed children to see the menko they were purchasing so the introduction of prizes and winner stamps didn't come into fashion until the early 1950s during the introduction of taba packs.



Picture 4: Examples of winner stamps on the back of menko

Early on in the menko era, dagashiya owners also ran lottery systems, or kuji, for kids to earn a

chance to get a bunch of sweets or menko. Step 2 shows an example of a pre-WW2 kuji sheet, known as an Atemono sheet (Ate " means " Winning" ; "Mono" means "goods"), and they worked like this. On the atemono sheets are 60 pieces of paper, face down. Of the 60 pieces of paper, or pulls, the breakdown is typically 44-5th place pulls, 8-4th place pulls, 4-3rd place pulls, 2-2nd place pulls and 2-1st place pulls. First, kids would pay a very small amount to money, in the 5 to 10 sen range, to get a pull. (Sen is an old, unused monetary unit that was abolished after 1953. 100 sen = 1 yen) They

would then pull out any of the pieces of paper and they would redeem it for the prizes that the dagashiya owner had established. Many times, menko were used as prizes and provided a way for kids to possibly obtain menko very cheaply. Usually the 5th place pulls would be an item that cost less than 5 sen, the 4th place pull might cost around 5 sen and then 3rd, 2nd and 1st place items would be worth more than the pull itself.

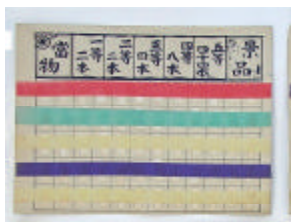
Obviously, since the end of the sumo menko era around 1965 dagashiya no longer stock "new" menko, but believe it or not, some

still have 60-year old unsold stock still lying around and for sale.

Usually, they have it tucked away in some hidden storeroom or tucked in the corner of there store where no-one typically looks. These are the best finds and the shop owners are usually very happy to get rid of the menko at reasonable prices. Finding dagashiya are a challenge, but it can be done. Get with some local townsfolk and ask them where the nearest dagashiya is or just walk around the older parts of town and you'll be sure to run across one or two.



Step 1: Find a dagashiya (Photo courtesy of <http://www.kct.ne.jp/~youme>)



Step 2: Locate the Akemono Sheet



Step 3: Pay 5 sen (Image courtesy of <http://www.worldcoingallery.com>)



Step 4: Pull



Step 5: Redeem