

Menko Corner

Cataloging Sumo Menko

by Ryan Laughton

After thousands of hours researching, identifying and cataloging sumo menko, I have come to three conclusions. First, sumo menko companies never published any set names or checklists. It is doubtful that any menko set names were even created at all, except maybe in some obscure company tracking database or in proprietary production information. Second, no one has ever attempted to identify or catalog sumo menko in any great detail and in any standard format. Finally, there is now a need to standardize and catalog menko sets and set-up a naming convention as well as catalog numbers because of the hundreds of different sets that are known to exist.

Both set names and catalog numbers are used to identify sets in different ways, although both are equally important. In this month's article I am going to lay the ground work for how set names and catalog numbers are established and then present the first 1/3 of the first-ever sumo menko database. In the April and June editions of SFM, I'll present the second and third parts to the sumo menko database so the entire database will be available for future reference by any sumo menko collector.

I established set names as a starting point to give meanings to each set. In reference to American Baseball Cards, set names are the 1952 Bowman, 1987 Donruss and the 1992 Topps Traded sets of the world. These have meaning to us all and we can easily relate to them. The following is how I've established sumo menko set

nomenclature. Sumo menko set names are broken down into 4 parts: 1)Year of manufacture, 2)Company, 3)Identifying mark and 4)number of digits in the Fighting Number. All sumo menko set names have parts 1,3 and 4, but part 2 is in about only 1/3 of all set names because of the limited manufacturing and company information. Thus, set names like the 1959 Yamakatsu Mizuoke 6, 1940 Nagoya Gunbai 4 and 1964 Marusho Tawara 5 came into existence.

I established catalog numbers as a way to bring standardization to the 300+ known sets in existence and to provide a quick and easy number collectors can reference when talking about particular sets. Before we can establish a complete cataloging system, we need to break up sumo menko and cards into 13 type or category series. The catalog letter is listed in parenthesis below along with an explanation and a description of each type.

1. **(R) Rikishi Menko** – This type is sometimes referred to as Sugata Menko or Hitokage Menko in non-sumo menko sets which literally means "Portrait Menko". I've renamed this type "Rikishi Menko" to make it easier to remember. These menko are very distinct in the fact that a cutting die was used to stamp unique and interesting menko shapes out from sheets of uncut menko.
2. **(M) Square Menko** – This type is referred to as Kaku Menko which literally means "Square Menko" and is the

most traditional of all menko. These menko are squares or rectangles and are printed on thick paper stock.

3. **(C) Circle/Round Menko** – These menko are called Nukitori Menko which translates to "Take-Out Menko" or "Pop-Out Menko". This is because they were issued in sheets and were expected to be popped out by kids after they were purchased. These menko were popular in the 1930s and 1940s and are obviously easy to recognize because of their round shape.
4. **(H) Brick Menko** – This type of menko is referred to as Kyokuku Menko which literally means "Extreme Thickness Menko". I've renamed them Brick Menko as they take on the shape, thickness and feel of a brick and made the ideal slammer during a game of menko.
5. **(BC) Bromide, Color** – You see this type sometimes referred to as Shashin Menko or literally "Picture Menko" on some taba packages, but the majority of menko companies issued these as bromides on packaging although not technically accurate.
6. **(BB) Bromide, Black and White** – The term bromide in sumo menko came from the use of silver bromide treatment on paper to produce a black and white or blue-black photographic image. These are true

bromides unlike the color bromides listed above.

7. **(P) Prize Sheet Card** – One of the unique features of bromide packaging was the taba packs and prize sheets. If a kid pulled a winner menko from a taba pack they would get to choose uncut sheets or sometimes large sized cards or menko of certain rikishi from a prize sheet. Often, these menko weren't meant to be played with, but rather collected, so this type of card warrants a special category.
8. **(S) Stadium/Kokugikan Card** – In the 1930s and 1940s before TV and when sumo tournaments were broadcast on the radio, sumo fans had very little with which to visually recognize their favorite rikishi. It is believed these sets were issued at the Kokugikan in order to provide fans with a visual reference of rikishi as well as when they took them home and listened to sumo on the radio.

9. **(G) Game Card** – Several sumo games with cards (non-karuta) were issued during the sumo menko era and are catalogued here for reference.
10. **(K) Karuta Card** – If you've ever been to Japan you will have likely encountered a game of karuta or two. Karuta was a hugely popular game among children throughout the sumo menko era and several sets were issued with rikishi on them.
11. **(A) Candy Card** – Several candy companies issued cards with their candy and are catalogued here for reference.
12. **(Z) Magazine Card** – In the 1950s and 1960s it was very popular to issue sets of cards inside certain magazines for kids to collect. There were several sets issued with rikishi on them.
13. **(B) Bookmarks** – A very unique category of sumo cards are the bookmarks. These were meant to be used

in the act of reading books, but the quality of photos and paper stock used on them makes them great collecting items and rivals many menko and so are listed here for reference.

This (following) is how I've established sumo menko catalog number nomenclature. Sumo menko set catalog numbers are broken down into 3 parts: 1) Category, 2) Last two digits in year and 3) Series number during that year. Additionally, many sets have different types such as different color ink on their back/revers side and this is marked with a hyphen and the Type Number after the core catalog number. Thus, catalog numbers such as R381, R382, M561-1 and K541 came into existence. Below is the first 1/3rd of the sumo menko set name and catalog number database and goes through 1954. It is listed in alphabetical order according to set name.

Set names with pictures can be found at www.SumoMenko.com.

Set Names	Catalog #	Set Names	Catalog #
1860 Kesho Mawashi 0	M1860	1951 Rikishi 5	R512
1911 Kyoiku Rikishi 8-10-11-12-13	R111	1951 Sanenchu 5 - Type 1: Dark Blue Ink on Back	M511-1
1930 Kesho-Mawashi 2-3	M301	1951 Sanenchu Block 5	M512
1930 Kimarite 0	M302	1951 Tsugaku 3	M513
1931 Rikishi 4	R311	1952 Gunbai 4 - Type 1: Tan Paper Stock, Gloss Front, Purple Ink on Back	M521-1
1932 Rikishi 5	R321	1952 Gunbai 4 - Type 2: Tan Paper Stock, Dull Front, Grey Ink on Back	M521-2
1933 Dai Gunbai 0 - Type 1: Purple Ink on Back	M331-1	1952 Gunbai 4 - Type 3: Grey Paper Stock, Dull Front, Purple Ink on Back	M521-3
1933 Dai Gunbai 0 - Type 2: Green Ink on Back	M331-2	1952 Gunbai 5	M522
1933 Dai Gunbai Bromide 0	BB331	1952 Gunbai Bromide 4	M523
1933 Rikishi 4-5	R331	1952 Kagome Rikishi 5 - Type 2: Grey Paper Stock	R511-2
1933 Rikishi 5	R332	1952 Kagome Trump 4	M524
1934 Rikishi 4	R341	1952 Sanenchu 5 - Type 2: Light Blue Ink on Back	M511-2
1935 Mini Disks	C351	1952 Trump 5-6	M525
1935 Rikishi 5 – Series 1	R351	1953 Kagome Rikishi 7 - Type 1: Red with Green	R531-1
1935 Rikishi 5 – Series 2	R352	1953 Kagome Rikishi 7 - Type 2: Green with Red	R531-2
1936 Rikishi 5	R361	1953 Kagome Sanenchu 7 - Type 1: Tan Paper Stock, Gloss Front	M531-1
1936 Rikishi Thin 5	R362	1953 Kagome Sanenchu 7 - Type 2: Grey Paper Stock, Dull Front	M531-2
1937 Dai Rikishi 4-5	R371	1953 Kimarite Bromide 0	BB531
1937 Kokugikan Set	S371	1953 Sanenchu 5 - Type 3: Purple Ink on Back	M511-3
1937 Rikishi 4-5	R372	1953 Trump 6 - Type 1: Tan Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Rough Gloss Front	M532-1
1937 Rikishi Thick 5	R373	1953 Trump 6 - Type 2: Grey Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Smooth Gloss Front	M532-2
1937 Rikishi Thin 5	R374	1953 Trump 6 - Type 3: Grey Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Dull Front	M532-3
1938 Rikishi 4-5-6	R381	1953 Trump 6 - Type 4: Grey Paper Stock, Thin Paper Stock, Dull Front	M532-4
1938 Rikishi 6	R382	1954 Asahi Sanenchu 10 - Type 1: Tan Paper Stock, Gloss Front, No Asahi Gangu Mark	M541-1
1939 Dai Rikishi 5	R391	1954 Asahi Sanenchu 10 - Type 2: Grey Paper Stock, Dull Front	M541-2
1939 Dai Rikishi Thin 5	R392	1954 Asahi Sanenchu 10 - Type 3: Grey Paper Stock, Dull Front, No Asahi Gangu Mark	M541-3
1939 Gunbai 5	M391	1954 Basho 7 - Type 1: Gold Ink on Front, Tan Paper Stock, Blue Ink on Back	M542-1
1939 Piero 5	M392	1954 Basho 7 - Type 2: Gold Ink on Front, Grey Paper Stock, Brown/Purple Ink on Back	M542-2
1939 Rikishi 3	R393	1954 Basho 7 - Type 3: Gold Ink on Front, Tan Paper Stock, Brown/Purple Ink on Back	M542-3
1939 Rikishi 6	R394	1954 Basho 7 - Type 4: Gold Ink on Front, Grey Paper Stock, Brown/Purple Ink on Back, Solid Shikona Box	M542-4
1940 Gunbai 5	M401	1954 Basho 7 - Type 5: No Gold Ink on Front, Dark Ink on Back, Solid Shikona Box	M542-5
1940 Kokugikan Set	S401		
1940 Nagoya Gunbai 5	M402		
1940 Nagoya Trophy 4	M403		
1940 Rikishi 3	R401		
1940 Rikishi 4	R402		
1940 Rikishi 5 – Series 2	R404		
1940 Rikishi 5 –Series 1	R403		
1940 Rikishi Thin 5	R405		
1940 Sensou 4	M404		
1941 Gunbai	M411		
1941 Kokugikan Set	S411		
1941 Rikishi 5	R411		
1942 Nagoya Gunbai	M421		
1944 Kagome Rikishi 4	R441		
1946 Kagome Down Rikishi 4	R462		
1946 Kagome Rikishi 3	R461		
1946 Kagome Up Rikishi 4	R463		
1946 Kimarite 7	M461		
1950 Rikishi 2	R501		
1951 Kagome Rikishi 5 - Type 1: Tan Paper Stock	R511-1		

Set Names	Catalog #	Set Names	Catalog #
1954 Basho 7 - Type 6: No Gold Ink on Front, Brown Ink on Back, Solid Shikona Box	M542-6	1954 Sanenchu 15-16	M549
1954 Basho 7 - Type 7: No Gold Ink on Front, Dark Ink on Back, Opaque Shikona Box	M542-7	1954 Sanenchu 6 - Type 1: Stripe Border on Front, Thin Paper Stock, Blue Ink on Back, Dull Front	M548-1
1954 Basho 7 - Type 8: No Gold Ink on Front, Brown ink on Back, Opaque Shikona Box	M542-8	1954 Sanenchu 6 - Type 2: Solid White Border on Front, Thin Paper Stock, Purple Ink on Back, Dull Front	M548-2
1954 Caricature 7 -Type 1: Dark Ink on Back	M543-1	1954 Sanenchu 6 - Type3: Solid White Border on Front, Thick Paper Stock, Purple Ink on Back, Gloss Front	M548-3
1954 Caricature 7 -Type 2: Aqua Ink on Back	M543-2	1954 YakyuSumo Karuta	K541
1954 Caricature 7 -Type 3: Orange Ink on Back	M543-3	1955 Asahi Gunbai 9-10	M551
1954 Kagome Sensou Trump 8-9 - Type 1: Grey Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Gloss Front	M544-1	1954 Kagome Sensou Trump 8-9 - Type 4: Tan Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Dull Front	M544-4
1954 Kagome Sensou Trump 8-9 - Type 2: Tan Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Gloss Front	M544-2	1954 Kagome Sensou Trump 8-9 - Type 5: Grey Paper Stock, Thin Paper Stock, Dull Front	M544-5
1954 Kagome Sensou Trump 8-9 - Type 3: Grey Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Dull Front	M544-3	1954 Kodomo Quiz 5 - Type 1: Tan Paper Stock, Gloss Front	M545-1
1954 Kagome Sensou Trump 8-9 - Type 4: Tan Paper Stock, Thick Paper Stock, Dull Front	M544-4	1954 Kodomo Quiz 5 - Type 2: Grey Paper Stock, Dull Front	M545-2
1954 Kagome Sensou Trump 8-9 - Type 5: Grey Paper Stock, Thin Paper Stock, Dull Front	M544-5	1954 Maruta Renga 7-8-9	H541
1954 Kodomo Quiz 5 - Type 1: Tan Paper Stock, Gloss Front	M545-1	1954 Niji Rikishi 7-8	R541
1954 Kodomo Quiz 5 - Type 2: Grey Paper Stock, Dull Front	M545-2	1954 Niji Trump 7-8 - Type 1: Brown Ink on Back	M546-1
1954 Maruta Renga 7-8-9	H541	1954 Niji Trump 7-8 - Type 2: Blue Ink on Back	M546-2
1954 Niji Rikishi 7-8	R541	1954 Rikishi 6-7-8	R542
1954 Niji Trump 7-8 - Type 1: Brown Ink on Back	M546-1	1954 Rokakuke 8-9 - Type 1: Thick Paper Stock, Gloss Front	M547-1
1954 Niji Trump 7-8 - Type 2: Blue Ink on Back	M546-2	1954 Rokakuke 8-9 - Type 2: Thick Paper Stock, Dull Front	M547-2
1954 Rikishi 6-7-8	R542	1954 Rokakuke 8-9 - Type 3: Thin Paper Stock, Dull Front	M547-3
1954 Rokakuke 8-9 - Type 1: Thick Paper Stock, Gloss Front	M547-1	1954 Sanenchu 15-16	M549
1954 Rokakuke 8-9 - Type 2: Thick Paper Stock, Dull Front	M547-2	1954 Sanenchu 6 - Type 1: Stripe Border on Front, Thin Paper Stock, Blue Ink on Back, Dull Front	M548-1
1954 Rokakuke 8-9 - Type 3: Thin Paper Stock, Dull Front	M547-3	1954 Sanenchu 6 - Type 2: Solid White Border on Front, Thin Paper Stock, Purple Ink on Back, Dull Front	M548-2
		1954 Sanenchu 6 - Type3: Solid White Border on Front, Thick Paper Stock, Purple Ink on Back, Gloss Front	M548-3
		1954 YakyuSumo Karuta	K541
		1955 Asahi Gunbai 9-10	M551