

Menko Corner Brick Menko

by Ryan Laughton

So far in this series of articles on menko I've talked about the ever popular Rikishi ("R") series menko, the rare Circle "C" series menko and the classic "M" or Square series menko. These are three of the 13 different series of menko and cards that exist in the world of vintage sumo. In this article, I am going to talk about the "H" or Brick series menko.

The H-series menko are some of my favorites and much harder to find on the market than most other menko or cards. There are only seven known sets that fit the bill of an H-series set with one or two more sets yet to be found. According to the series description, H-series menko are thick, heavy and of much higher quality than their counterparts. They were marketed in the toy stores as Kyokuku Menko, or "Extremely Thick Menko."

All sets have a beautiful layer of gloss applied to the front of the menko and the majority are printed with gold ink. What really makes the H-series stand apart is the fact that it was marketed as the slammer menko during a menko game; much like the role of a shooter in a game of marbles. Most H-series menko have dimensions of approximately 2" by 3".

The first known H-series set, the H541 – 1954 Maruta Renga 7-8-9 set (see picture 1), was printed in

1954 and had a beautiful gloss coat and exceptional gold ink. Unfortunately, for some reason, the quality of the cutting process that Maruta Gangu used was still unrefined and many of these menko have off-center cuts. This set also features a pip on the back, which was common during the early 1950s, as well as different pictures of US military vehicles and atomic bomb themes.



Picture 1 (H541 Set) – First known H-series Set, 1954 Maruta Renga 7-8-9

Kagome Gangu printed a high-quality non-gold set in 1955, the H551 – 1951 Kagome Renga 10 set (see picture 2). What makes this set different from the others is that the menko were printed in two dimensions: thick and extremely thick. The extremely thick menko have a thickness of 1/8"! The colors on this set are very vivid, but unfortunately Kagome was struggling with its printing processes and the registration is off on most menko.

Kagome Gangu entered the gloss and gold Kyokuku menko scene in

1956 with the H561 – 1956 Kagome Renga 6 set (see picture 3), but stole images from other menko sets it was printing at the time and adapted them to the H-series. Unfortunately, the Kagome printing process was still working out the kinks and the registration on many of the menko is very poor. The backs are extremely simple with a playing card pip and a six-digit Fighting Number at the bottom. This Kagome set is very hard to find.

The three boom years of H-series menko were 1954, 1955 and 1956. But in 1974 there was another high point in sumo popularity as well as a small resurgence of sumo menko and cards. The lone H-series set from this boom was the H741 – 1974 Nazo Nazo 3 set (see picture 4). The fronts feature a high-quality photo of the rikishi and nice, vivid colors. The backs have standard menko marks: Gu-Choki-Pa, Fighting Number and a War-Themed Word. The unknown maker also printed on the back a nazo, or puzzle, with a riddle and an answer printed upside down on the bottom. These riddles offered clues about such hot topics as red peppers, books and baseball gloves.

Thanks for reading about H-menko this issue, and I'll be back next time to start getting into Black/White and Color Bromide sets. Until then, cheers!





Picture 2 (H551 Set) –1955
Kagome Renga 10



Picture 3 (H561 Set) – 1956
Kagome Renga 6



Picture 4 (H741 Set) – 1954
NazoNazo 3