

## Menko Corner Taba Pack Rip

by Ryan Laughton

I recently published a book on sumo menko and cards called the Sumo Menko and Card Checklist. In the book I've identified and cataloged hundreds of mainstream and unique sumo menko and card sets. However, the book will always be a work in progress and since its publication I've continued to find more and more sets to catalog. In fact, I have another 30 or so sets that will be included in the Second Edition of the Checklist. Among these sets is a unique and historically important set, but before this last week it went unnoticed in my collection.

Several months ago I was fortunate to find a taba pack manufactured by what appears to be the Yagome or Maruko Toy Company containing an unknown set. It is unclear whether the company name is actually Yagome or Maruko as both marks appear on the taba pack so for now I'll call it the Yagome Maruko Gangu (Toy Company). This is the only set where I have seen these marks (See Picture 1).



Picture 1: Yagome mark (left) and Maruko mark (right)

When I bought the taba pack I assumed it was from the early 1950s because of the hand-drawn picture of a rikishi on the front of the cover and because menko were issued in taba packs starting in the early 1950s. I also assumed that



Picture 2: Front Cover (left) and Back Cover (right)

because it was from the 1950s it would be one of the many dozens of black and white bromide sets issued during this time. Consequently, I wasn't in any hurry to open any of the envelopes as cataloging all the 1940s and 1950s black and white bromide sets is a monumental task. I figured once I opened one of the envelopes I'd be able to recognize almost instantly which set it came from. So this taba pack was stowed away while I finished the first edition of my book and I planned to do more investigation while I was gathering material for the second edition. Last week I decided to open a few envelopes from the taba pack to see what was inside and it turned out to be a great find.

The taba pack itself measures right at 5" x 7" and contains 31 individual pink/salmon colored envelopes. I imagine that there

were probably 32 to 40 envelopes in a full taba pack, but a few were missing when I bought it. The front cover has a vividly colored drawing of a rikishi that says "Sumo Pro" vertically in kanji and katakana. In the upper right corner it has written in kanji ooban which means "Large Sized". The lower left corner has the Yagome mark and above that is a stamp that was affixed to the front which has the Maruko mark. The back cover of the taba pack contains the Yagome mark which is a T.H. inside a red rhombus. Below that is the Maruko mark along the bottom right (See Picture 2).

I decided to pull a couple of random envelopes off of the taba pack for set identification and cataloging. The packs came off really easily as the pink envelope paper is really thin. When I pulled the first card out of the envelope I



Picture 3: Maegashira Shachinosato (left) and Yokozuna Futabayama (right)

was shocked to see who it was. It wasn't a 1950s rikishi at all, but rather the early/mid 1940s rikishi, Maegashira Shachinosato, who hung out in the Juryo & Maegashira ranks from 1937-1947.

It was an early color halftone printed bromide card (BC-series). It took me a few seconds to figure out what I had stumbled upon which is a taba pack manufactured 10 years prior to any other known taba pack! Furthermore, this taba pack survived World War II and was now sitting before me 70 years later! I immediately looked at another 1940s set that I had

cataloged (BB403) and realized that both of these sets were very similar in size and design meaning they were probably printed by the same company. I still had one more envelope to open and I was hoping it would be of a rikishi that would allow me to narrow down the year this set was printed. Lo and behold I pulled the one card that narrowed down the year to 1940 or 1941 and it was a card of one of the most famous and successful yokozuna of all time, Yokozuna Futabayama! There are numerous cards of Futabayama in this pose from 1940 and 1941 (See Picture 3) so it was easy to narrow

down the year.

There are likely 20 – 30 different cards in this set and they would have been of all the high ranking rikishi of the early 1940s. The halftone printing quality is high and the paper stock is of good quality. The front of the card has the rikishi's shikona written vertically in the upper right corner and along the left side are 5 lines of the rikishi's statistics. These lines consist of birthplace, heya, height, weight and favorite technique.

The backs of these cards are blank which is common for a card of this type from the 1940s. Opening more envelopes would also allow us to see if there were any winner stamps on the back of the card indicating there was a prize sheet and prize cards associated with the set. For now, though, the answer will have to wait until more examples of this set surface.

As of this writing I have decided to catalog this set with the catalog number BC402 and set name "1940 Yagome Maruko Color Bromide" and it will appear in the second edition of the Sumo Menko and Card Checklist. Enjoy the Nagoya Basho and I'll catch up with everyone in a few months! Cheers.