

Menko Corner

1953 Kagome Rikishi 7 Set

by Ryan Laughton

Kagome Gangu Kaishi (Kagome Toy Company) produced several Rikishi Series menko sets between 1944 and 1957, but none rivals the size and uniqueness of the 1953 Kagome Rikishi 7 Set. This set was printed to mirror the 1953 Aki Banzuke and I consider it the absolute pinnacle of the sumo boom menko issues. The 1953 Set was truly colossal for its day in terms of size, quantity and quality of rikishi. In fact, 7 of the modern day yokozuna and 4 of the modern day ozeki appear in this set at various stages in their career. Furthermore, every other rikishi depicted in this set made it to at least komusubi except for Narutoumi!

The approximately 2.0 x 3.25 inch and 1/16 inch thick menko were the biggest size ever offered for individual sale. At 46 menko, it was also the largest set ever produced. One of the major design innovations that Kagome capitalized on was the superimposing of actual photos of rikishi's heads onto a drawing of their kesho-mawashi. The ink colors used on the menko front were extremely bright and vivid, and the backs sported a clean 3-column design that wasn't cluttered.

The artwork on the fronts is simple, yet representative of the actual kesho-mawashi. One interesting printing technique that wasn't identified until recently is the color reversal on every menko produced. In short, two versions of each menko were printed where the red and green colors are swapped, resulting in a "red" version and "green" version.

Kagome really pulled off a zensho-yusho with this set!

Let's break down this set and explore some of the "firsts" and "lasts" in this set and find out why this is truly a sumo menko collector's dream set.

40th Yokozuna Azumafuji (2854000) – The 1953 Aki Basho is the last basho in which Azumafuji competed healthy. He also won his 6th and final yusho this basho and never again obtained kachi-koshi because of injuries. He retired exactly one year later. This is the last menko of Azumafuji ever printed!

41st Yokozuna Chiyonoyama (1390520) – A nice early yokozuna menko of Chiyonoyama.

42nd Yokozuna Kagamisato (4798310) – Kagamisato's yokozuna debut menko! Kagamisato was promoted to yokozuna only two basho before this and this is his first ever yokozuna menko!

Ozeki Yoshibayama (43rd Yokozuna) (1942001) – Yoshibayama's last ozeki menko! Yoshibayama was promoted to yokozuna two basho later.

Ozeki Tochinishiki (44th Yokozuna) (4785020) – Tochinishiki's last ozeki menko! He was promoted to yokozuna at the beginning of 1955.

Sekiwake Asashio (46th Yokozuna) (5894170) – Asashio's sekiwake debut menko!

Sekiwake Matsunobori (8432450)

– Matsunobori's debut menko! (first menko ever printed of him!)

Komusubi Wakanohana (45th Yokozuna) (7504320) – Wakanohana's last komusubi menko! He was promoted to sekiwake the next basho.

Komusubi Tokitsuyama (2532021) – Tokitsuyama's debut menko! (first menko ever printed of him!)

Maegashira 1E Kitanonada (1420401) – Kitanonada's debut menko!

Maegashira 1W Otachi (8452010)

Maegashira 2E Shimizugawa (9825421) – Shimizugawa's debut menko!

Maegashira 2W Dewanishiki (7904210) – Dewanishiki's debut menko!

Maegashira 3E Kuninobori (7005000) – Kuninobori's debut menko!

Maegashira 3W Nayoroiwa (6432150) – This former ozeki's last menko ever printed!

Maegashira 4E Tamanoumi (5290120) – Tamanoumi's debut menko!

Maegashira 4W Wakasegawa (9024510) – Wakasegawa's debut menko!

Maegashira 5E Narutoumi (6532410) – Narutoumi's debut menko!

Maegashira 5W Shinobuyama (6428000) – Shinobuyama's

debut menko!

Maegashira 6E Kotonishiki (6849240) – Kotonishiki’s debut menko!

Maegashira 6W Orochigata (unknown)

Maegashira 7E Kotogahama(5200129) –

Kotogahama’s debut menko!

Maegashira 7W Wakabayama(8450759)

Its loads of fun to try and build this complete set because of the color variations and scarcity of the menko. Fortunately, almost all menko are well-centered and many are still in decent condition

because of the thickness and durability of the material. If you have the patience and the financial resources, it’ll be a very enjoyable, educational and rewarding challenge. Expect to pay around \$200-\$250 to assemble the set and don’t expect a complete set to hit the market anytime soon. That would be too easy. Until next time...cheers!



Picture 1: The 40th-46th Yokozuna. Note red and green versions on Azumafuji, Chiyonoyama and Wakanohana.



Picture 2: Back side of menko