

# Menko Corner

## Black and White Bromide Menko

by Ryan Laughton

This article is the fifth in a series detailing the 13 different kinds of sumo menko and cards that exist. Previously we talked about the R-series or “Rikishi menko,” the rare C-series or “Circle menko,” the classic M-series or “Square menko” and the H-series or “Brick menko.” This month I am going to talk about the BB-series or “Black and White Bromide menko.”

Since color photographs were still a novelty when sumo menko were first mass produced in the 1930s, many photos were printed in black-and-white using a printing process involving silver bromide. The Japanese used silver bromide to make some very beautiful black and white photo cards and referred to these cards as bromide (pronounced Bu-ro-ma-i-do in Japanese) for short. Bromides were meant to be collected and displayed in childrens’ rooms or in scrap books.

The silver bromide process was used in the 1930s and 1940s, but did not lend itself for use in menko as the photographic paper that was needed for the process was very thin. Consequently, a new technique was needed to print photographs on thicker cardboard for menko games. Black-and-white, and color printing, switched to the halftoning process of printing photographs. Menko photos were typically printed on the standardized 1.75” by 3.0” card stock. (Click this link to learn more about [halftoning](#).)

This type of printing was used heavily in the late 1940s and exclusively in the early 1950s on sumo menko. However, the Japanese still referred to these

photograph halftone-printed menko on the 1.75” by 3.0” card stock as “bromide menko” or bromides as verified on numerous prizes sheets and advertising displays. So this switching of printing techniques, but not the switching of terminology, has led to some confusion and different approaches to cataloging Japanese cards and menko. My approach is to catalog all bromide cards and bromide menko, regardless of intended use, under the BB and BC series identifiers to keep consistent with the Japanese terminology.

1930s BB-series cards are hard to find. Many of these menko were destroyed in the war or were turned in for the paper drives in support of the Japanese war effort. However, a few sets exist such as the 1938 Mini Bromide Set (BB381) (See Picture 1). There are only two confirmed cards in this set and many cards probably didn’t survive because of their small size which is a tiny 1” X 1.75”.



Picture 1 (BB381 Set) – Yokozuna Tamanishiki – 1938 Mini Bromide

The 1940s saw the most sets of silver bromide BB-series cards printed and there were probably upwards of 50 different sets made during this decade. Although not

too difficult to find, they are very tough to catalog because of the lack of printing on the back on the card and very few distinguishing marks on the front. Typical silver bromide BB-series cards have the rikishi’s shikona on the front with other various statistics such as birthplace, height, weight, heya, favorite technique and birthplace. Below is a circa-1946 silver bromide BB-series card of future Yokozuna Maedayama.



Picture 2 (c1946) – Uncatalogued Black and White Bromide of Maedayama as an Ozeki

The switch to halftone printing for BB-series cards/menko happened in the late 1940s. These “new” BB-series cards/menko are printed on heavier paper stock and typically have a standard printing size of 1.75” x 3.0,” with many being found with standard menko markings on the back for easy cataloging. These halftone printed BB-series cards were meant for use in menko games and most have only the rikishi’s shikona on the front. Additionally, BB-series menko from the 1950s usually have a color bromide counterpart set, or a BC-series set, that shares the same back design and was printed at the same time (See Pictures 3 & 4).

It was probably cheaper to design

and print card stock with the same back instead of two different backs for each of the series.



Picture 3 (BB574-1) – Maegashira Otachi - 1957 Marushou Sensou Bromide 5: Type 1

The last BB-series set used for playing menko was printed in 1960 by Marusan Gangu. The BB609 is a great set and includes the future Yokozuna Taiho at the rank of sekiwake. This set was issued in taba packs and children would have the opportunity to pull winner cards and get large bromide cards as a prize. It is



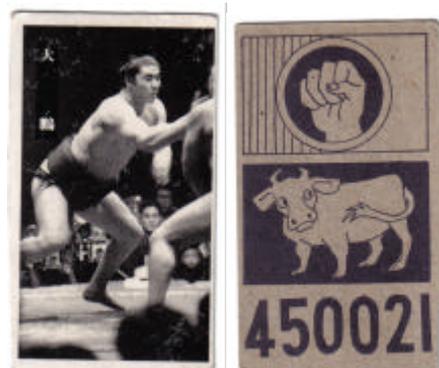
Picture 4 (BC574-3) – Maegashira Tokitsuyama - 1957 Marushou Sensou 5: Type 3

unknown which prize was issued with the bromide cards of this set, but there were more-than-likely three levels of winner cards with the #1 prize being a very large bromide card. There was probably only one #1 winner card in the entire taba pack.

The BB-series of cards and menko are quite unique and easy to find on the online auction market today, but unfortunately they aren't that popular with collectors.

This is partly due to the massive amounts of them which built up from the 1940s, and no real catalogued information to determine the sets each bromide belongs to.

In the next issue of SFM, I will look at the BC-series or Color Bromide cards and menko. Until then, cheers.



Picture 5 (BB609) – Sekiwake Taiho - 1960 Marusan Jyunishi Bromide 5-6