

A History Of The Match...in Japan

The Japanese have always been more serious about their matches than we Americans. They have a 'Match Day', observed annually to celebrate the first matches made in Japan, and there are a number of statues and monuments throughout Japan to commemorate various early match factories, match innovators, and famous label collectors, for example. *[please note that I would like my own statue pigeon-proofed]*

Makoto Shimizu was the father not only the Japanese match, but the Japanese match industry. In 1875, he produced the first matches made in Japan, working in a temporary factory in a friend's home in Shiba, Tokyo. In the following year, he established Japan's first match company, "Shinsuiha", in Tokyo, and began manufacturing "Yellow Phosphorous Matches". By 1878, the company was exporting matches to China.

In 1879, Makoto visited the Jonkoping match factory in Sweden to learn more modern manufacturing methods. Upon his return, he began manufacturing safety matches in Japan. Over the next few years other entrepreneurs establish other match factories.

In 1884, Japan enacted its first trademark regulations, and in the following year Makoto's company registered Japan's first trademarked label, 'Crouching Lion.'

In 1904, Sadajiro Inoue of Osaka invented the 'thin-stick' match, which enabled Japanese match boxes, which up to then carried 60 matches, to now hold 100-120. In 1916, Makoto's company was merged with another to form the 'Takigawa Match Co.', which in turn was reformed in 1917 into the 'Toyo Match Co., Inc.' The latter is notable here because Toyo is probably the only Japanese match manufacturer that American collectors might be familiar with.

The match industry in Japan continued to expand, but by the late 1920s, Swedish Match was already making major inroads into it. By 1932, Japanese match exports to the U.S. were doing very well. Most of Japan's match factories were destroyed in World War II, but the industry quickly bounced back. Around 1956, there was a major production switch from wooden matches to paper matches, and the customization of Japanese matches began. Today, Japan is a major player in global match production, although overshadowed by such nations as India and China.

And while all this was happening, Japanese collecting bloomed and prospered. Hekisui Fukuyama was Japan's most famous label collector. When he passed away in 1934, he had well over 200,000 labels. 60 years later, when Teiichi Yoshizawa passed away at the age of 90, he had already been identified by the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the top label collector in the world.

Hekisui Fukuyama also founded Japan's first phillumenic club, 'Rinshikinshukai', in 1903. And, he held Japan's first label exhibition in 1907. Soon, there were a number of label clubs all over Japan, and it became chic to give label albums as presents. In 1920, his club published his country's first philluminic bulletin. Such exhibitions and clubs continue in Japan today. *[<http://www.match.or.jp/english/history/history01.html>]*

