

### ***Sakazuki* Culture: Military Cups and Drinking Games**

*Sakazuki* are closely associated with formal rituals, but they have also played an important role in day-to-day culture as accessories to merrymaking.

During the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Japan fought in many wars, including the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), and World Wars I and II (1914–1918 and 1940–1945). During this period, it was a common custom for a returning soldier to give commemorative *sakazuki* like those displayed on the right to their parents or close friends as a celebration of their homecoming. Orders for these custom pieces helped support provincial ceramic industries, such as the one in Ichinokura.

The left side of the case displays *bekuhai*, oddly shaped sake cups that are used in drinking games. Some have no flat surfaces, or a hole that must be plugged with a finger. Cups like these cannot be set down without spilling their contents, forcing whoever uses them to drink what they are given. One game uses a set of three *bekuhai* in the shapes of three stock characters from Japanese folk culture. A player spins a top to see which of three cups he or she must drink from. The smallest cup, in the shape of Otafuku, the kind-faced goddess of mirth, holds only a sip, but the middle-sized cup, in the shape of the bumbling fool (*hyottoko*) has a hole in its base. Largest is the long-nosed *tengu* cup, which holds a sizeable portion and cannot be set down.

Other *bekuhai* have unusual or entertaining properties. One fountain-shaped cup will suddenly empty itself if overfilled. The flasks in the back are called “nightingale carafes” (*uguisu tokkuri*) because they make a noise like a warbling bird when the sake is poured.