

History of the Former Tashiro Family Western-style House (Seiyōkan)

The Former Tashiro Family *Seiyōkan* was built in 1876. The original construction date and name of its first owner, Tashiro Sukesaku (d. 1890), were discovered on a wooden plank uncovered during renovation work undertaken between 2014 and 2016. Formerly known as the Arita Ijinkan, it was restored to its original appearance, renamed, and designated a National Important Cultural Property in 2018.

Exports of Arita ware had declined severely during the 1700s, but with the lifting of trade bans between Japan and the West in the 1850s, new opportunities for overseas export arose. Sukesaku was the son of Tashiro Monzaemon (1817–1900), who was the second person to be licensed as an official exporter of Arita ware by the Saga domain. With the death of Hisatomi Yojibe'e (d. 1861), who had resumed Arita ware exports to the Dutch in 1841, Monzaemon became the only official exporter of Arita ware. Sukesaku, who oversaw the family's business in the Shanghai market, decided to construct a building in Arita that he could use for negotiations and accommodate foreign buyers visiting the town.

When it was constructed, the building's fusion of Japanese and Western architecture was considered distinctive and cutting edge. Several original features of the building remain: the curved staircase in the foyer, windowpanes, door frames, and stained glass. A woodcut printing block of the family crest was used to recreate the original wallpaper, which was uncovered during restoration. Other recreated features include the second-floor veranda and the light fixtures throughout the house.