

Tsujiseijisha

Tsujiseijisha is the kiln run by the Tsuji family, which has been producing porcelain since the seventeenth century. Their kiln building and ancestral home dates to 1863 and is part of Arita's Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings. A wooden plaque on the right side of the gate into the property denotes the kiln's status as an official purveyor to the Imperial Household Agency, a position it has held for over 350 years.

The passage of time is visible in the door frame of the gate. The street in front of the house used to end at the Tsuji property. Horse-drawn carriages had to turn around in the slightly wider space within the gate. Scrapes made by the carriages are still visible on the bottom left side of the gate. Today, some of the streets are still so narrow that people in the neighborhood must park their cars in communal lots a slight distance away.

Tsuji's white porcelain decorated with blue underglaze (*sometsuke*) is famous for its thinness and exquisite designs featuring flowers, birds, and other auspicious symbols. Orders prepared for the Imperial Household Agency are especially difficult work, because the pieces are fragile and must be of impeccable quality. To prevent such painstakingly handmade pieces from being ruined in the final firing process by ash or smoke, the eighth head of the family invented an original method of firing called *gokushin-yaki*. The piece to be fired is put inside of a saggar-like container made of the same unfired clay. The two items are fired together, and the outer container protects the piece inside. Historically kilns were fired with wood, but most modern kilns use gas or electric kilns with computerized processes that simplify production. Tsujiseijisha, however, continues to use an over fifty-year-old gas-powered kiln, keeping it running with regular repairs. Because every piece needs to be perfect, adjusting for humidity, air quality, and other conditions is an important part of Tsujiseijisha's production process. Transitioning to a new kiln would require the relearning of the techniques built up over the past 50 years on the current kiln, which ensure perfect firing.

The Tsuji family was the sole purveyor of Arita porcelain to the Imperial Household Agency until the Meiji era (1868–1912). Eventually other kilns were designated as official purveyors in order to share the workload when it became too much for the Tsuji family kiln to accomplish alone. For example, upon its formation, Koransha was designated a purveyor to the Imperial Household. Its founders were renowned Arita craftsmen, including Fukagawa Eizaemon VIII (1832–1889) and his brother-in-law Tsuji Katsuzo (1847–1929), the eleventh head of the Tsuji family.