

Privilege and Competition: Tashiroya in the East Asian Treaty Ports, 1860–1895

Takahiro Yamamoto, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

Introduction

Porcelain products comprised an important part of Japan's economic and cultural exports in the late nineteenth century. The majority of these products came from a town called Arita, in today's Saga Prefecture (the Saga Domain until 1871), tucked in a valley some fifty kilometres north of Nagasaki. Even today, Arita's streets are filled with porcelain shops and kilns, and many residential houses boast a large front window that showcases the occupants' collection.

This paper traces some of the transcultural flows of people, information, and materials that ran through the network of East Asian ports in the late nineteenth century, through the case study of a family of porcelain producers and wholesalers from Arita named Tashiro, and their shop, Tashiroya. During the four decades after Japan's signing of commercial treaties with the European states and the United States in 1858, which involved the opening of ports for free trade, Tashiroya placed employees, many of them family members, in numerous ports, including Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki, Shanghai, Chefoo, Tianjin, and Hong Kong, while also exporting to the United States and Europe.¹

Several nineteenth-century accounts of the Japanese community in Shanghai have made a passing mention of the activities of Tashiroya's branch there.² Tashiro Genpei (originally Tomonari Genpei), an adopted son of Tashiro Keiemon, opened the first private Japanese shop in Shanghai's Suzhou Street in August 1868. It sold porcelain and lacquerware to the residents

1 Tashiroya appears in some sources as Tashiro Shōten. The branch based in New York was called Tashiro-gumi. In government documents and newspaper advertisements, Tashiroya in China was sometimes referred to as Tashiro Yōkō. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to them as Tashiroya throughout the paper.

2 Hideo Yonezawa, *Shanghai shiwa* 上海史話 (Tokyo: Unebi Shobō, 1942); Kagenao Tōyama, *Shanghai* 上海 (Tokyo: Kokubunsha, 1907).

of Shanghai, and general merchandise that catered to the demand of female Japanese residents—an increasingly noticeable group in the entertainment sector of that port. Genpei soon began running a hotel for Japanese visitors. In 1885, the Shanghai branch was entrusted to a man named Kaneko Kenjirō, who shuttled across East Asian ports in collaboration with his brother, Kantarō, also a Tashiroya employee. Kenjirō briefly tried selling sweets at Sima Street, before switching back to selling general merchandise. As Kenjirō took over the porcelain business, the hotel was run by another employee, Furutate Yōzō.

The employees of Tashiroya were frequent travellers across the China Seas, sometimes crossing borders several times in the span of a few weeks. Japan introduced passports in 1866, and even though the passport system's enforcement was incomplete at the waterfront, the application records for passports in Nagasaki give us snippets of the extent and frequency of Tashiroya's travels. Between 1868 and 1890, Genpei applied for passports five times. The name of Tashiroya Gōsaku, Genpei's brother, appears three times. Sukesaku, a cousin of Genpei and Gōsaku, shows up three times, and so does Kenjirō. Monzaemon and Keiemon, Sukesaku's father and uncle, both appear once.³ These numbers almost certainly provide only a partial indication of the frequency of their travels, for, after 1878, Japanese travellers were allowed to make multiple trips between China, Korea, and Japan with a single passport. By the 1880s, the regular shipping service of Nihon Yūsen Kaisha (NYK) through Japanese, Korean, and Chinese ports rendered it possible to fathom an integrated East Asian market. The Tashiroyas were among the tens of thousands of people who crossed the sea annually—a hundred-fold increase from the figure at the beginning of the system of open ports.⁴

Since the late 1980s, the work of Hamashita Takeshi and others has encouraged historians to view the seas around East Asia as a route or a zone to be analysed in its own right, and to understand the nineteenth century as “the era of negotiations” that brought about the expansion of

3 Diplomatic Archive of Japan (DAJP), 3.8.5.8. Reel 1 and 2.

4 For instance, 39,611 and 37,329 passengers went from Japan to Shanghai in the years 1889 and 1890 respectively on NYK's ships. In the same two years, 26,513 and 26,554 people crossed the sea from Shanghai to Japan. Nihon Keieishi Kenkyūjo, ed., *Nihon yūsen kabushiki kaisha hyakunenshi* 日本郵船株式会社百年史 (Tokyo: Nihon Yūsen, 1988), 64.

migrant merchants into the treaty ports.⁵ Tashiroya were the pioneers of exporting Arita ceramics to the Chinese market during this era of treaty port networks. Yet today their names are largely omitted from mainstream historical narratives of Japan's economic modernization or of Sino-Japanese interactions, with the exception of the specific context of Arita's local history.⁶ When any reference is made to porcelain, it is the rival company Kōransha that receives most of the attention. Kōransha has been a major producer of Arita porcelain since its establishment in 1875, and its records from the earliest stages of operation are decorated with recognitions and awards from across the Western world, including the gold medals received in the Paris Exhibitions in 1878 and 1900, the Barcelona Exhibition in 1888, and the Japanese-English Exposition in 1910.⁷

Where did the Tashiros go? Business historian Yamada Takehisa has pointed out that Tashiroya's strategy involved the direct export of daily-use porcelain, such as teacups with simple red paintings, to the Chinese market. This was in contrast to other producers from Arita, most notably Kōransha, who focused on the luxury markets in the United States and Europe through participation in international exhibitions, as noted above.⁸ Yet the full extent of Tashiroya's activities, especially the way in which their business declined, has not been studied. The following micro-historical analysis of Tashiroya's business provides

5 Takeshi Hamashita, "Tributes and treaties," in *The resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 year perspectives*, eds. Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita, and Mark Selden (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 17–51. For a collection of his writing in English, see Takeshi Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Grove and Mark Selden (Abingdon: New York: Routledge, 2008).

6 For Japan's treaty ports, classical works include Azusa Ōyama, *Kyūjōyakuka ni okeru kaishi kaikō no kenkyū* 旧条約下における開市開港の研究 (Tokyo: Ōtori shobō, 1967); James Hoare, *Japan's Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements: The Uninvited Guests, 1858-1899* (Folkestone: Japan Library, 1994); Shinya Sugiyama and Linda Grove, eds., *Kindai Ajia no ryūtsū netowāku* 近代アジアの流通ネットワーク (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1999). For a detailed study of the impact of Japanese ports outside the treaty system in Japan's economic rise, see Catherine Phipps, *Empires on the Waterfront: Japan's Ports and Power, 1858-1899* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015). For the legal impact of the treaty port network, see Par Cassel, *Grounds of Judgment: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth-Century China and Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Jianhui Liu, *Demon Capital Shanghai: The "Modern" Experience of Japanese Intellectuals*, trans. Joshua Fogel (Portland, Maine: MerwinAsia, 2012); Zu'en Chen, *Shanghai ni ikita nihonjin* 上海に生きた日本人 (Tokyo: Daishūkan Shoten, 2010).

7 Kōransha, "Company Profile," https://www.koransha.co.jp/koransha/koransha_english.html. [Accessed on February 15, 2018].

8 Takehisa Yamada, "Meiji zenki ni okeru Hizen tōjūkyō no yushutsu senryaku" 明治前期における肥前陶磁器業の輸出戦略. *Keiei Shigaku* 経営史学 30, no. 4 (1996): 32–58.

a ground-level view of the workings of trade in the treaty ports, and the transcultural dynamisms across the East Asian waters in the late nineteenth century. It adds to the historiography of East Asian treaty ports by describing a Japanese business's endeavour to survive in a shifting commercial environment, entangled with local and international politics.⁹ The paper argues that Tashiroya's decline towards the end of the nineteenth century reflected its loss of close relationships with, and preferential treatment by, the Japanese government.

The crucial part of the following account relies on the Tashiro family's papers, deposited in the Arita History and Folklore Museum (Arita Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan). These papers are supplemented by official and semi-official documents held in Nagasaki, Tokyo, and Seoul. The extent of the surviving records varies across the late nineteenth century, and it is generally better for the late 1880s and the early 1890s than for other periods. Most of the documents are communications involving Tashiro Monzaemon and his son Sukesaku, who took charge of the Nagasaki branch for most of his working life (although he made visits to Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chefoo) until his premature death in 1890. Perhaps because the family documents came to the archive from a descendant of Sukesaku, the papers relating to his uncle Keiemon and his three sons—Gōsaku, Genpei, and Ichirōji, who ran the Yokohama branch—are much less extensive. The following sections will divide the history of Tashiroya into three parts: Tashiroya's rise, led by Monzaemon from 1856 to the late 1870s; competition in the Chinese treaty ports during the 1880s, when Sukesaku played a central role; and the firm's decline in the 1890s, when the employees made a risky decision to expand the business into Korea in an attempt to revive the firm's fortunes.

9 Recent works on merchants in East Asian treaty ports include Simon Partner, *The Merchant's Tale: Yokohama and the Transformation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Harald Fuess, "E. Meyer & Co. at the Eastern Frontiers of Capitalism: The Leading Western Merchant House in Korea, 1884 to 1914," *Journal of Business History* 62, no. 1 (2016): 3–30; Robert Hellyer, "1874: Tea and Japan's New Trading Regime," in *Asia Inside Out: Trading Empires of the South China Coast, South Asia, & the Gulf Region Volume 1: Critical Times*, eds. Helen Siu, Peter Perdue, and Eric Tagliacozzo (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 186–206; Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson, eds., *Treaty Ports in Modern China: Law, Land and Power* (London: Palgrave, 2016). For a European merchant's perspective of the earliest years of Yokohama, see C. T. Assendelft de Coningh, ed., *A Pioneer in Yokohama: A Dutchman's Adventures in the New Treaty Port*, trans. Martha Chaiklin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012).

Monzaemon and the rise of Tashiroya, 1856–80

The emergence of Arita as a porcelain-producing town stemmed from political, geological, and economic factors closely tied to major historical events in East Asia. The technical expertise necessary for the production of porcelain, unavailable in Japan until the end of the sixteenth century, came to the archipelago because of the Imjin War (1592–1598), staged by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Nabeshima Naoshige, the warlord based in Saga who took part in Hideyoshi's campaign to invade Korea, brought Korean potters back to his fief. In a mountain near Arita, the potters discovered a fine deposit of Kaolinite, a clay mineral used for porcelain, and began production in the early seventeenth century. The potters imitated the Chinese style, and the expansion of porcelain production in Arita partly resulted from the decline of imports from China due to the political turmoil occurring there towards the end of the Ming dynasty. The result was the development of a porcelain industry in Japan, including Arita.¹⁰

The story of the Tashiro family as overseas merchants begins in 1856. In that year, Tashiro Monzaemon, an honorary samurai permitted to use surnames and carry swords for having made donations to the Saga Domain,¹¹ received the exclusive privilege from the lord of Saga to export porcelain from Nagasaki.¹² Monzaemon's rise was fortuitous in the short run, as it coincided with the Tokugawa shogunate's signing of commercial treaties with four European countries and the United States in 1858 and thus the beginning of free trade between Nagasaki and the East Asian treaty ports. Between 1861 and 1868, Tashiro held a monopoly over the export of porcelain to "America, England, and other countries," which in effect included all countries except the Netherlands and Korea.¹³

10 Barbara Seyock, "Trade Ceramics from selected sites in western Japan, late 14th to 17th centuries," *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* 26 (2006): 131–139; Takenori Nogami, "On Hizen porcelain and the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade," *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* 26 (2006): 124–130.

11 The business was carried out in the name of his son, Sukesaku, because those with the samurai status were barred from trading activities. Hiroki Nakajima, *Hizen Tōjiki shi kō* 肥前陶磁器史考 (Kumamoto: Seichōsha, 1985 [1936]), 539.

12 Takehisa Yamada, "Meiji zenki tōjiki sanchi ni okeru kikai dōnyū" 明治前期陶磁器産地における機械導入, *Ōsaka Daigaku Keizai-gaku* 大阪大学経済学 45, no. 1 (1995): 33–47.

13 Arita History and Folklore Museum Tashiroke Monjo (AHFMTM) 0132. The domain issued separate exclusive licenses for these two countries to different merchants. Mariko Yamagata, "Bakumatsuki Sagahan fukokusaku no tenkai to kokunaigai shijō" 幕末期佐賀藩富国策の展開と国内外市場, *Shakai Keizai Shigaku* 社会経済史学 69, no. 3 (2003): 47–71, here 67.

Annual sales exceeded ten thousand *ryō*.¹⁴ Monzaemon's privileged position and business strategies invited local controversy, for he was known to bring in thinner porcelain objects from another town, have them painted in Arita, and then sell them overseas. Even though he could claim that this was done in order to tailor the products to the taste of European consumers, procuring and exporting goods from another domain was not only considered an affront to the local potters, but also a breach of the domain's law.¹⁵ However, the Nagasaki magistrate acquiesced to this practice, and so did the local magistrate in charge of the porcelain industry.

Under the order of the Tokugawa shogunate, the Saga Domain took turns with the neighbouring Fukuoka Domain for the defence of Nagasaki and therefore paid close attention to regional events. Convinced of the necessity of modernizing its military and keen on exploring further commercial interactions with the world, the domain dispatched two officials to Shanghai on the *Senzaimaru*, to accompany the shogunate's observation mission in 1862. Five years later, the domain sent its own trade mission, which included Monzaemon, to Shanghai.¹⁶ This was one of the earliest domain-led overseas missions after the Tokugawa Shogunate had legalized overseas travel by Japanese residents the previous year. The domain set up a branch of its own trading house in Shanghai with the help of the Dutch consul, P. Theodore Kroes.¹⁷ Soon afterwards, Keiemon's stepson Genpei opened a shop, but sources are not clear about its connection with the domain's shop. One source says that the Tashiro family took over the domain's enterprise after the abolition of domains in 1871.¹⁸ Other sources claim that Genpei had already moved to Shanghai in 1868 and opened

14 Yamada, "Meiji Zenki." In comparison, the Saga Domain in 1858 purchased its first steamship for seventy thousand *ryō*, or approximately one hundred thousand dollars. See Yamagata, "Bakumatsuki Sagahan fukokusaku no tenkai to kokunaigai shijō."

15 For the discussion on the development of mercantilist economic policy at the domain level during the Edo period, and its relationship with the concept of *kokueki* (countries' interest), see Luke Roberts, *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

16 Yamagata, "Bakumatsuki Sagahan," 67–68. On the voyage of the *Senzaimaru*, see Joshua A. Fogel, *Maiden Voyage: The Senzaimaru and the Creation of Modern Sino-Japanese Relations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014).

17 Rongguang Huang, "Bakumatsuki Senzaimaru Kenjunmaru No Shanhai Haken Nado Ni Kansuru Shinkoku Gaikō Bunsho Ni Tsuite" 幕末期千歳丸・健順丸の上海派遣等に関する清国外交文書について, *Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo Kiyō* 13 (2003): 176–200; Yosuke Iwamatsu, "Bakumatsu Saga Hanshi Ga Mita Chūgoku 幕末佐賀藩士が見た中国," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium on the History of Indigenous Knowledge* (Saga daigaku chiikigaku rekishi bunka kenkyū sentā, 2012), 88–93.

18 Nakajima, *Hizen Tōjiki shi kō*, 539–541.

his business in August of that year.¹⁹ A local history of Arita claims that the domain's shop was inherited by Monzaemon, who then changed its name to Tashiro Shōkai.²⁰ There is agreement, however, that Genpei's premises, located at the corner of Suzhou Street and Yuanmingyuan Street in Hongkou, was the first private Japanese shop in Shanghai.²¹ It reflected the Saga Domain's attempt to expand the export of porcelain to China, at a time when the Chinese domestic supply was severely disrupted due to the Taiping Rebellion.

Back in Arita, Monzaemon's aggressive business practices met opposition from other potters, who lacked access to this seemingly excellent commercial opportunity. In 1868, Monzaemon's deputy was punished and the license for export was extended to ten additional potters.²² The consequence was the creation of a level playing field for Japanese porcelain producers across East Asia, where treaty ports were opening in quick succession. This incident marked the end of Tashiroya's monopoly within the system of highly regulated trade under the Tokugawa regime. Monzaemon and his family faced a new commercial environment with domestic competition, but for the time being, they remained closely associated with the Saga Domain's zeal for economic modernization. As the biggest export commodity, porcelain sat at the centre of Saga's strategy for economic regeneration.

It was probably in Shanghai that Tashiroya enjoyed the closest connection with the leaders of the Meiji government. It was a natural gathering spot for Japanese travellers to the port, although their numbers were still small at this point. In the tumultuous year of 1868, the Meiji government issued thirty passports for travellers going to China.²³ The number hovered around a few hundred per year throughout the 1870s, but among them were some prominent men who made a stop at Tashiroya in the middle

19 For instance, Chen, *Shanghai ni ikita nihonjin*, 23–24.

20 Arita Chōshi Hensan Iinkai (ed.), *Aritachōshi shōgyōhen* 有田町史商業編 vol. 2 (Aritamachi: Aritamachi, 1988), 88–89.

21 Chen, *Shanghai ni ikita nihonjin*, 23–24; Nakajima, *Hizen Tōjiki shi kō*, 540–541; Joshua Fogel, “Japanese travelers to Shanghai in the 1860s,” in Joshua Fogel and James Baxter, eds., *Historiography and Japanese Consciousness of Values and Norms* (International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, Japan, 2002), 79–99.

22 Arita, *Aritachōshi shōgyōhen*, 88–89; “Tashiro Monzaemon,” in *Tōki jiten* 陶器事典, ed. Tōkurō Katō (Tokyo: Shima Shobō, 1954), 583–584.

23 Minoru Ishizuki, *Kindai nihon no kaigai ryūgakushi* 近代日本の海外留学史 (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 1972), 154.

of their official travels, such as interim foreign minister Soejima Taneomi, originally from the Saga Domain, and Ōkubo Toshimichi, one of the most prominent figures in the early Meiji regime. Shinagawa Tadamichi, the first Japanese consul in Shanghai, also spent his first days in the city at Tashiroya.²⁴

Tashiroya maintained a close connection with the central government in the 1870s. This was perhaps partly thanks to hosting these Meiji leaders and the firm's pre-existing relations with the Saga Domain's former samurai class, many of whom now worked for the Meiji government even after the dissolution of domains in 1871. In the early 1870s, Tashiroya carried over the project that the Saga Domain had started, namely the export of porcelain to the global market, which the domain had hoped would provide a means of financing domestic reforms. Unlike the later period, judging from its participation in the International Exhibition in Vienna in 1873 it was still eyeing the luxury market in Europe. Responding to a request from the Meiji government, Tashiroya, under the name of Keiemon, submitted to the exhibition a pair of vases that were over 160 centimetres tall. Even though no member of Tashiroya joined the mission to Vienna led by Ōkuma Shigenobu, the finance minister and a Saga native, these towering vases signified to the Meiji government Tashiroya's worth as an advertiser of Japan's cultural sophistication.²⁵

In Shanghai, Genpei was a useful commercial agent upon whom the government could rely when only a handful of Japanese lived in the city. For instance, in July 1874, the navy ministry purchased a piece of land from a British trading house in the Pudong area on the eastern outskirts of the city's International Settlement.²⁶ The ministry used this location primarily to store coal, and Tashiroya leased the land as a designated commercial agent of the ministry.²⁷

24 Rongguang Huang, "Meijiki ni okeru yushutsu tōjiki sangyō no hensen" 明治期における輸出陶磁器産業の変遷, *Proceedings of the International Symposium "New Vistas: Japanese studies for the next generation"* (Kyoto: International Research Center of Japanese Studies, 2014), 137–153.

25 *Aritachōshi tōgyōhen* 有田町史陶業編 vol. 2, 137–138. Ōkuma was a nominal head and did not travel to Vienna.

26 Enclosed document attached to letter from foreign ministry to navy ministry, August 8, 1874. DAJP 3.12.1.52.

27 Tashiro Monzaemon to navy ministry, March 5, 1879. National Archive of Japan (NAJP), Meiji 12 kōbun ruisan zenpen vol. 15 dobokubu 1. Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) Ref.C09113287100.

This land lease in Pudong led to unforeseen bureaucratic complications a few years later. The agricultural division of the interior ministry (Naimushō kangyōkyoku) decided to develop a wool industry in Japan, and imported sheep through Kamohara Yahei, an employee of Tashiroya's Shanghai branch, purchasing several hundred sheep from Mongolia once in the winter of 1877 and once in 1878. The sheep were transferred from Tianjin and made a stop at Shanghai, taking up a temporary residence in the navy's coal depot. The navy complained that it made the place "extremely unhygienic," but had to acquiesce after requests from Kamohara and the agricultural division.²⁸ Kamohara was responsible for looking after the sheep, but he seems to have mismanaged the warehouse: the smell of sheep remained in the building for several months after their departure, and there was even a theft of twenty-seven sheep at one point.²⁹ When Shinagawa Tadamichi, the Japanese consul in Shanghai, inspected the warehouse in March 1878, he found it all but dilapidated:

[...] as for the warehouse, it is not even properly built, with only the pillars made with bricks. Between these pillars are pieces of wooden board covered with plaster. It has peeled off because of wind and rain. The outer surface of the board is all rotten, and water is permeating it. Overall, it looks like it is on the verge of collapse.³⁰

A navy officer carried out another inspection in November 1878, and found that "the place was dirty and was being managed very poorly." He recommended that the ministry consider not renewing the lease to Tashiroya.³¹

Shortly before the lease contract between the navy ministry and Tashiroya expired in December 1878, a public-private trading company based in Hokkaido, Kōgyō Shōkai, applied for the lease, in order to

28 Sone Toshitora (lieutenant) to navy ministry, November 13, 1877; Kamohara Yahei to navy ministry, December 11, 1877. Kōbun Ruisan Meiji 10 kōhen vol. 43 honshō kōbun hōritsubu vol. 2. JACAR Ref. 09112749000.

29 Sone Toshitora to navy ministry, November 1877. NAJP, Kobun Ruisan Meiji 10 kōhen vol. 43 honshō kōbun hōritsubu vol. 2. JACAR Ref. C09112746500.

30 Shinagawa Tadamichi (Shanghai consul) to Kawamura Sumiyoshi (navy minister), March 19, 1878. Kōbun Ruisan Meiji 11 zenpen vol. 22 honshō kōbun dobokubu vol. 3. JACAR Ref. C09112827000. Author's translation. All other quotations in this paper are also translated by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

31 Ishikawa Toshiyuki (navy ministry secretary) to Kawamura Sumiyoshi (navy minister), November 17, 1878. National Archives of Japan (NAJP) Kōbun Ruisan Meiji 11 kōhen vol. 21 dobokubu vol. 1. JACAR Ref. C09113016000.

acquire storage for exporting goods to the Shanghai market. The navy made a decision to give the space to Kōgyō Shōkai in January 1879, but the Tashiros did not give up. Hoping to reverse the decision and renew the lease for another three years, they used all their political connections. In addition to sending three separate petitions to the navy ministry, written by Monzaemon, Genpei, and Kaneko Kenjirō, they also obtained a recommendation from Utsumi Tadakatsu, the governor of Nagasaki. However, the navy ministry flatly rejected the plea and signed the lease with Kōgyō Syōkai on April 28.³² The favourable conditions for Tashiroya had certainly begun to shift away from the days of exclusive trade licenses.

The reason for Tashiroya's persistence is not entirely clear. Even though the lease price of thirty-six to thirty-seven Mexican silver dollars per year was probably cheap, the place seemed of little use to them.³³ One possible explanation is that it was a way of maintaining a relationship with the navy. Regardless of the aim, the end of the lease was unfortunate for Tashiroya, since, if properly cultivated, this kind of close relationship with the state could have made a major contribution to the growth of the firm. Affinity with government officials was a key to success for many of the prominent entrepreneurs of Meiji Japan, such as Iwasaki Yatarō of Mitsubishi, whose shipping service was able to overcome stiff competition from the Peninsular & Oriental Co. of Britain and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company of the United States due to a heavy dose of government subsidies.³⁴ This loss of its cosy relationship with government officials in Shanghai proved to be a bad omen for Tashiroya.

Sukesaku's struggle, 1879–90

Sometime before 1878, Sukesaku replaced Monzaemon as the head of the Tashiro's main household (*honke*), and in March 1879 his cousin, Gōsaku, became the head of the branch household (*bunke*). On this occasion, Gōsaku jotted down a note in which he thanked Monzaemon for the care he had received from the latter despite his wild (*hōratsu*) demeanour

32 Utsumi to Kawamura Sumiyoshi (navy minister), March 8, 1879. National Archive of Japan, Meiji 12 kōbun ruisan zenpen vol. 15 dobokubu vol. 1. JACAR Ref.C09113287100.

33 For comparison, in 1886, Tashiroya rented the house for its Shanghai branch at the monthly price of 60.75 dollars. Furutate to Sukesaku, February 24, 1886. AHFMTM 0739.

34 For the development of NYK, see William D. Wray, *Mitsubishi and the N.Y.K., 1870–1914: Business Strategy in the Japanese Shipping Industry* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University), 1984.

after his marriage, which he now regretted. He then pledged that he would “work hard by putting the business first,” and that Monzaemon and Sukesaku could have his house and land in Nagasaki as collateral if he got into financial trouble.³⁵ In the 1880s, Sukesaku’s generation sat at the centre of Tashiroya’s operations.

Shortly afterwards, Gōsaku collaborated with Mitsui Bussan Kaisha, one of Japan’s biggest financiers, in the export of porcelain to the United States. Leading the New York branch of Tashiroya, he accepted Mitsui’s investment between 1880 and 1882, and relied on the company’s ships for carrying goods across the Pacific. The investment was 22,622 yen in 1881 for export to the United States, but sales did not live up to expectations. The following year, Gōsaku only managed to repay 14,125 yen and Mitsui’s records do not show any further transactions involving him.³⁶ Yamada Takehisa has noted that, because of this low performance in the American market, Tashiroya and other porcelain sellers began to reorient their export towards the Chinese market. By December 1883, Gōsaku was back in Nagasaki, applying for a passport to go to Singapore, and hinting that the family’s attention was turning from the North-American to the Southeast-Asian market.³⁷

Around the same time, it became clear that Tashiroya’s strengths no longer lay in luxury products. In 1881, Monzaemon and Sukesaku submitted twenty-six pieces of porcelain, including vases, lamp holders, and bowls, to the second Imperial Japanese Domestic Industrial Exposition (*Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai*), held in Ueno Park in Tokyo. Three other groups from Arita submitted porcelain objects: Kōransha, Seiji Kaisha, and Shirakawa Elementary School (where pottery was part of the pupils’ education). It was most likely an embarrassing moment for Tashiroya when all of the other Arita participants received a prize from the government, while they had to go home empty-handed.³⁸ From the next round of the exposition onward, the Tashiros did not even enter submissions.

35 Gosaku to Monzaemon, April 15, 1878; Gosaku to Monzaemon, March 28 and 30, 1879. AHFMTM 0667.

36 Shōichi Asajima, “Sōgyōki Mitsui Bussan no shotōshi: Meiji 9 nen–25 nen no kōsatsu” 創業期三井物産の諸投資--明治9年~25年の考察, *Senshū Daigaku Shakai Kagaku Kenkyūjo Geppō* 専修大学社会科学研究所月報 565 (2010), 1–59. Note that the Japanese currency switched from *ryō*, used under the Tokugawa shogunate, to yen, in 1871. See Marius Jansen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan Vol. 5: The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 606.

37 DAJP 3.8.5.8. Reel 2.

38 *Aritachōshi tōgyōhen* vol. 2, 168–178.

Losing the edge for high-end products meant that they had to concentrate on daily-use or industrial porcelain for the East Asian market. Nevertheless, the general market environment for porcelain in the 1880s was difficult. In Tianjin, the import of foreign porcelain (which effectively meant Japanese porcelain) surged tenfold in 1885 from the previous year (chart 1).³⁹ However, this boom lasted for just two years. The Japanese consul in Tianjin explained the rising demand as being due to the novelty of the Japanese products, which were assessed at the same tax rate as Chinese products, and the dealers' decision to import large quantities. Arakawa Minoji, the acting consul at Tianjin, pointed out that most of the porcelain bought during the two-year boom was put into stock and did not reach consumers. Worse, the Japanese products proved to be less durable than the Chinese competition, and their colour and design were not sufficiently standardized, which made it difficult, for instance, to buy a pair of teacups that matched each other exactly. Facing these difficulties, it was not long before some companies began dumping their stored products, dragging down the retail price. Arakawa noted that the price for a large teacup went from twenty *sen* (one fifth of a yen) to two or three *sen* by 1885 and 1886. The rise in the import tax for Japanese porcelain in 1887 was another blow to the trade.⁴⁰ Japan's treaty with the Qing government had no most-favoured-nation clause, and therefore had no way of circumventing the change in the Qing's tax rates.

Tashiroya tried to turn things around by developing a new product: electric insulators for telegraph poles. In Japan, the production of insulators using porcelain started soon after 1869, following the installation of a telegraph line between Tokyo and Yokohama. A year later, the Telegraph Office (*Denshinryō*) asked Fukagawa Eizaemon, who would become one of the founding members of *Kōransha*, to produce electric insulators made of porcelain.⁴¹ In trying to export insulators to China, Tashiroya faced competition from this local rival.⁴² Both companies wanted the Chinese market to themselves, and each filed a

39 Made by the author. Data includes only the goods that went through customs and not junk trade. Retrieved from a memo by the Japanese consulate in Tianjin, September 12, 1892. Enclosed in Arakawa Minoji (acting consul in Tianjin) to Hayashi Tadasu (deputy foreign minister), September 14, 1892. DAJP 3.5.4.27.

40 Memo by Japanese consulate in Tianjin, September 12, 1892. Enclosed in Arakawa Minoji (acting consul in Tianjin) to Hayashi Tadasu (deputy foreign minister), September 14, 1892. DAJP 3.5.4.27.

41 Seiki Nakayama, *Arita yōgyōno nagare to sono ashioto: Kōransha 100 nen no ayumi* 有田窯業の流れとその足あと: 香蘭社百年の歩み (Aritamachi: *Kōransha*, 1980), 6.

42 *Aritachōshi shōgyōhen* vol. 2, 220–221.

competing patent.⁴³ The Japanese government approved neither and instead contemplated a division of labour—Kōransha for Japan’s domestic market and Tashiroya for China—but this did not materialize. Sukesaku got his first order of fifty thousand insulators at twenty-eight sen per unit from the Chefoo *daotai* (circuit intendant) in 1887 and Tashiroya completed the delivery by winter of that year.⁴⁴ When Sukesaku came back the next year to negotiate another round of orders, the Chefoo *daotai* demanded a reduced price of twenty sen. This was because Kōransha had sold ten thousand units at twenty sen earlier in 1888. Sukesaku had no choice but to match the reduced price to sign the deal.⁴⁵

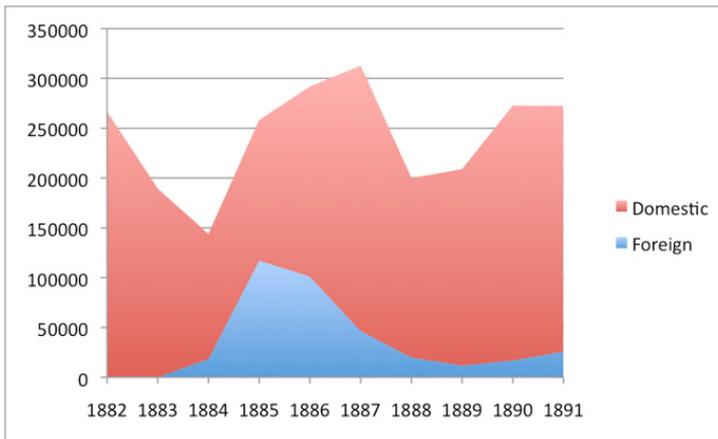


Chart 1: Values of domestic and foreign porcelain arriving at Tianjin (in taels).

The entry of Tashiroya into the insulator business in China unleashed a price war among the Japanese suppliers there, an “utter stupidity” in the words of Hayashi Gonsuke, the Japanese vice consul of Chefoo.⁴⁶ As a result,

⁴³ For Tashiroya’s patent application, see Sukesaku to Yamagata Aritomo (agricultural and commercial minister), September 21, 1886. AHFMTM 0573.

⁴⁴ *Daotai* 道台 referred to the administrative units below the governors-general in the provincial governments in the Qing Empire. There were around one hundred of them, though the number fluctuated throughout the dynasty’s reign. The holder of this position took charge of a range of civil and military affairs in a given region (*dao*), which usually consisted of two to three prefectures within a province. See Yuansheng Liang, *The Shanghai Taotai: Linkage Man in a Changing Society, 1843–90* (Singapore: NUS Press, 1990), 5–7.

⁴⁵ DAJP 3.5.4.26.

⁴⁶ Hayashi Gonsuke to Asada Tokunori (foreign ministry, commerce division chief), June 25, 1887. DAJP 3.5.4.26.

the Japanese government decided that it needed to implement measures in order to stabilize the price. Under the initiative of Takahira Kogorō, the Japanese consul in Shanghai, three Arita companies, namely Kōransha, Tashiroya, and Higuchi Haruzane, signed a price-maintenance agreement on July 28, 1888. Their pact required the registration of all exporters of insulators at the Japanese consulate of each of the respective cities; prior price consultation with other companies; the prevention of major price deviation between cities; and an agreement to avoid monopoly.⁴⁷

The agreement proved ineffective. In 1889, the Chefoo daotai, having heard that Sukesaku was in Shanghai, invited him to Chefoo to place another order. When Sukesaku showed up, the Chefoo daotai demanded a price of nineteen sen, noting that someone had sold 4,200 insulators at that price in Shanghai earlier that year. Alarmed by this potential loss of bargaining power, the acting Japanese consul at Chefoo, Nose Tatsugorō, urged Sukesaku to stand firm. After several rounds of negotiations, Sukesaku managed to sell fifty thousand units at twenty sen. Nose reported to Tokyo that the cause of the difficulties in maintaining prices might be attempts by one of the insiders to squeeze out the competitors.⁴⁸

As Sukesaku struggled for the sale of insulators across the Chinese coast, the hotel business in Shanghai performed no better. Once the population of Japanese residents in Shanghai began to increase and various types of accommodations sprang up, Tashiroya as a hotel was no longer as popular as before. Astor House, Kaiyōgō, and Kiyōgō were the hotels that people with more money frequented. Soon after taking charge of the hotel in 1885, Furutate Yōzō reported to Sukesaku in Nagasaki that the hotel was hardly making any profit. For example, in 1885, the Shanghai branch was narrowly covering the loss in the hotel business with the sales of porcelain. Furutate lamented that “hardly any of our guests pay the rent without delay; people who come to this port are usually in debt.”⁴⁹ Thus, Furutate wrote to Sukesaku to ask the guests’ parents, back in Japan, to pay on their sons’ behalf. Some of the parents, upon request, indeed sent money to Sukesaku in Nagasaki.⁵⁰

47 Hayasi Gonsuke (vice consul of Chefoo) to Asada Tokunori (commerce division chief, foreign ministry), June 25, 1887. DAJP 3.5.4.26.

48 Nose Tatsujirō (acting vice consul of Chefoo) to Aoki Shūzō (deputy foreign minister), August 27, 1889. DAJP 3.5.4.26.

49 Furutate to Sukesaku, February 24, 1887, AHFMTM 0739.

50 AHFMTM 0735.

By 1888, Furutate's report showed his uneasiness about Tashiroya's worsening standing in Shanghai:

[...] as you know, if I stay with the management of the hotel and do not interact with the high society in this port, there is a risk of being excluded [*haiseki*] [...] if I suddenly pretend to be upper class, that is also quite improper and will not win respect.⁵¹

By the late 1880s, Tashiroya was trying to save money wherever it could. It is clear that the managers took full advantage of the emerging connectivity that accompanied the expanding Japanese steamship services offered by vessels of Mitsubishi Mail, which started a regular service between Shanghai and Nagasaki in 1875. Tashiroya employees smuggled merchandise in order to circumvent customs at Chinese ports by carrying goods in their hand luggage, and by asking the steamship's staff to do so too.

Although it is impossible to confirm the extent of this tax avoidance, Furutate's letter quoted below provides a sufficiently clear picture of their plan. He bemoaned that, after the creation of NYK following the merger of Mitsubishi Mail and Kyōdō Unyu in 1885, the inspection of luggage had become stricter. He pointed out, however, that ships' servants could still avoid on-board inspections. The problems arose when they got off at Shanghai, because "the customs' checks are thorough these days." Yet the risk was worth taking, because, even if the boys were caught, "it is just the matter of paying some fines."⁵² Furutate named three individuals, each serving on three different ships of the NYK, with whom they were friendly. One of them, who went by the name Matsuno (no first name mentioned) and worked on the *Yokohama Maru*, was to be the first to undertake the smuggling operation in February 1886. Prior to his departure Furutate explained the plan:

From now on, I will be asking a man named Matsuno who is a boy in the lower [cabin] of *Yokohama Maru* to carry goods. When the ship arrives at your port [Nagasaki], he will visit your house. If you have anything to send [to Shanghai], feel free to give it to him. I will give him a letter addressed to you and he will be taking this round of upbound service, so please bear that in mind. For the transportation fee, I will give it to him at

51 Furutate to Sukesaku, May 18, 1888. AHFNTM 0741.

52 Furutate to Sukesaku, January 20, 1886. AHFMTM 0739.

this port for those goods only. Please note that too. You can also ask him [to carry] goods from your place to Kobe or Yokohama. He is from Yokohama, and is well-known to our customer Mr. Muraoka. So I will ask him about [Matsuno's] background and will report that in future correspondence.⁵³

Judging from the letter it is highly probable that Furutate and Sukesaku's tax-dodging started with the *Yokohama Maru*, and their intention was to make it a regular habit. Indeed, it was not limited to the boys who covertly carried Tashiroya's merchandise. Sukesaku and his employee Nakamura Yūsuke were once caught carrying a large quantity of porcelain on their way to Shanghai. Below is what Sukesaku wrote soon after this ill-fated arrival in Shanghai in October 1886 to his father, Monzaemon, back in Nagasaki:

At six p.m. on the second, as we departed, a police officer came and checked all of the passengers' passports. On the next day, around nine p.m., a Westerner on the ship in charge of cargo came and began to check Chinese passengers' hand luggage. He made unreasonable claims and exacted the transportation fee of fifty sen or eighty sen. [Then] he checked my bags. I told him it was for two people. The cargo man said it was too much even for two people, and I should pay a fee of two dollars. I told him that would be too much. The cargo man said, if it was all clothes I may be excused, but the weight [of these bags] is heavy and the inside needs to be checked. I said the content was porcelain to be given as a souvenir. Then another Western man came and told me discreetly that I should pay him one dollar. Later on, the accounting officer came and gave me the payment receipt.⁵⁴

This was not the end of the story. When Sukesaku was disembarking, he was afraid that the volume of his luggage might cause further problems. He therefore left Nakamura on board, disembarked alone, and sought Furutate to ask what he should do. However:

A couple of Western officers from customs came and boarded the ship. They inspected goods even in the servants' room, not to speak of the cooks' room (apparently they are conducting a

53 Furutate to Sukesaku, February 17, 1886. AHFMTM 0739.

54 AHFMTM 0741.

thorough inspection, due to the recent cases in which people smuggled a large amount of sulphur, salt, and other items into China in their hand luggage). [The inspectors] came to my bags and asked if they were hand luggage. I said they are, but apart from the clothes there were souvenirs to be taken to Tianjin. The inspectors then immediately opened my bag, seized them [...] and took them to customs.⁵⁵

The seized goods were five pieces of porcelain. Sukesaku protested through a Japanese interpreter, but the inspectors took Sukesaku's porcelain objects to customs office. Sukesaku was able to recover them only after getting help from the Japanese consul and paying the tax (1.82 dollars) and the fine (7.86 dollars). Sukesaku warned Monzaemon that they should avoid sending excessive amounts of goods as hand luggage, because "it was a real nuisance."⁵⁶

Sukesaku's account is interesting in a number of ways. The fact that he reported this "incident" to his father suggests that, to begin with, the passport check and on-board luggage inspection were not standard procedure, at least in their understanding at the time. Sukesaku did not say whether he had a passport, but the application record kept at Nagasaki around this time has no corresponding entry on him. Nevertheless, if he was indeed fined for undocumented travel, he would most likely have reported that to Monzaemon. Thus, the likelihood is that he was carrying an old passport from a previous trip. Multiple entries on a single passport had been allowed since 1878 between China and Japan, specifically for the convenience of people like Tashiroya employees.⁵⁷ It is also interesting that he was able to negotiate the fee with two officers (who, presumably, worked for the Chinese maritime customs) and there does not appear to have been a standardized rule with which to determine the payable amount. Yet, most importantly, their attempt to haggle over taxes and fines amounting to only a few dollars speaks to the shop's general financial standing of the time.

55 Sukesaku to Monzaemon, October 8, 1886. AHFMTM 0741.

56 Sukesaku to Monzaemon, October 8, 1886. AHFMTM 0741.

57 NAJP, *Dajō ruiten* 3, vol. 19. Notice from the foreign ministry, March 22, 1878. JACAR Ref. DA00623100. On the development of Japan's passport system, see Takahiro Yamamoto, "Japan's passport system and the opening of borders, 1866–1878," *Historical Journal* 60, no. 4 (2017): 997–1021.

A recovery shot in Seoul in the 1890s

Compared with the relative privilege that it had enjoyed in the 1860s and the early 1870s, by the beginning of the 1890s, Tashiroya struggled to make ends meet. The general condition of the market was no longer favourable. In April 1889, the tax for Japanese porcelain imported to China was increased, which had the effect of reducing Japanese exports to China. In the following year, the porcelain dealers in Arita conducted hardly any business and many left the town to find seasonal work.⁵⁸ In the nearby village of Kuma, the number of active kilns decreased from about sixty to around ten.⁵⁹ In this difficult period, Sukesaku, who sat at the centre of business operations in the Nagasaki branch, died in 1890 in his early forties.⁶⁰

The remaining members of the family seem to have had no clear strategy for going forward, but the sale of insulators to the Qing led them to stumble upon another business opportunity. Nakamura Yūsuke, who was shuttling between the Shanghai and Chefoo branches, learnt about the plan to renovate Gyeongbokgung, the Korean royal palace in Seoul. Nakamura and Kaneko Kantarō, both agents of Tashiroya in China, jumped on the news, immediately visiting the Japanese consulate in Chefoo with samples of roof tiles. After obtaining a letter of introduction from a consular officer, the two agents headed to the Japanese legation in Seoul and met Kokubu Shōtarō, the legation secretary.⁶¹ Kokubu recommended them to Kim Changhyun, a senior member of the Korean court who oversaw the palace renovation project directed by the ruler, the Daewongun. The approach from Tashiroya was well-timed because the Koreans had not been able to find a company able to produce the palace's signature feature: blue roof tiles. In the past, they had been provided by Qing artisans, but this time Kim had not found anyone suitable. After consultation between Kim and the Tashiroya agents, tile samples were introduced to the Daewongun, who liked the product and decided to procure thirty thousand roof tiles from a company that had hitherto been unknown to them. Kim Changhyun

58 *Saga Shinbun* 佐賀新聞, March 6, 1890. Cited in *Aritachōshi shōgyōhen* vol. 2, 108.

59 *Saga Shinbun*, June 6, 1891. Cited in *Aritachōshi shōgyōhen* vol. 2, 108.

60 Yamada, "Meiji Zenki," 50. Sukesaku's age is calculated by his passport application record from 1884, which noted his age as "thirty-seven years and eight months." According to the common practice of counting one's age in the lunar calendar, he would have turned forty-three on January 1, 1890. DAJP 3.8.5.5.–1 vol. 5.

61 This part of the account is derived from Ōtori to Mutsu, January 5, 1894, DAJP 3.3.17.6.

and Kaneko Kantarō signed a contract in the summer of 1891, with the advance payment of 1,378 yen, including the initial purchase of 1,000 tiles for 117 yen.⁶² While Tashiroya had little record of producing roof tiles, landing this contract was nonetheless a major achievement and could have paved the way for Tashiroya's financial recovery. Nakamura and Kantarō took Kim to Arita, and expanded Tashiroya's factory buildings in order to enhance its production capacity. The advance money from Korea funded all of these additional economic activities.

When Kim was still in Arita, a strong storm hit the town, destroying the raw tiles already under production and badly damaging the newly built factory. Tashiroya managed to manufacture the initially promised one thousand tiles, but the contract for the entire order needed renegotiation. With the pilot products finished, therefore, the party decided to go back to Seoul. Nakamura, Kantarō, and Kim left Arita in the middle of November, and boarded NYK's Genkai Maru from Nagasaki.⁶³ In accordance with the original contract, Kim had arranged with Korean officials at the port that the tiles would be tax-free.⁶⁴ They arrived in Seoul in early December, and Kim and Kantarō signed a revised contract with a new deadline at the end of the second month of 1892 (lunar calendar) for the delivery of thirty thousand tiles. Tashiroya had less than four months to regroup and resume production.

Another problem emerged when Kim inspected the tiles that he had brought back. It turned out that out of the one thousand tiles, three hundred had broken during transport. Indeed, the remaining tiles fared no better, as they proved to be far from durable enough to endure the Korean winter, and many of them had cracked.⁶⁵ Since the amended contract of December 1891 included no references to these broken or cracking tiles, it is likely that Kim found out about the problem only after the Tashiroya agents had departed.

The deadline of early 1892 passed without the arrival of the tiles at Inchon. In spite of repeated requests for explanation from Kim through

62 AHFMTM 0661.

63 The departure of Nakamura and Kaneko can be crosschecked with the fact that they received passports in Nagasaki on November 20, declaring Seoul their destination. The application record has a slightly different first name for Nakamura, but that is most likely a copying error. DAJP 3.8.5.8 Reel 8.

64 *Chongkwan kongmun* 總關公文 vol. 5, December 2, 1891. http://db.history.go.kr/id/mk_073_0050_0720. [Accessed on October 29, 2016].

65 Note by Kim Changhyun, dated May 24, 1892. DAJP 3.3.7.16.

the Japanese consulate in Seoul, neither Kantarō nor the Tashiro family in Arita responded. As the problem dragged on, Sugimura Fukashi, the Japanese consul in Seoul who was transmitting the message back to Japan, eventually got the attention of Tokyo. The foreign ministry began to urge the officials of Saga Prefecture, which encompassed Arita, to take the initiative in ensuring Tashiroya's implementation of the contract.

Given the potential stakes involved in the problem, the response from both the Meiji government and Tashiroya was remarkably slow. It took the Japanese government more than a year to take any substantive action that would elicit a response from Tashiroya. In September 1893, a Saga prefectural officer visited Tashiro's house in Arita, but was unable to find either of those responsible for the deal—Kantarō and Nakamura. The officer talked to Monzaemon, who was in his late seventies and looked “senile,” and Sato, the widow of Sukesaku, but found neither to be capable of handling the problem. The two did, however, produce a petition to explain their position to Kim Changhyun and the Korean court. The tone of the letter was to defend the actions of Tashiroya and to resist taking full responsibility. After making apologies for the delay in replying to the repeated inquiries, the Tashiros suggested that Kim might bear part of the responsibility for the quality of the tiles, given that he himself had visited Arita to examine the soil quality. The company, Monzaemon and Sato argued, considered his opinion in producing the tiles, and therefore the sixty-five hundred tiles that they had produced so far should be accepted in lieu of returning the advance money. “If we were to pay the remaining amount in cash, we could do it only through a ten-year loan,” they added.⁶⁶

Upon receiving this petition in Seoul, Kim rejected the idea that he was partially responsible and insisted that Tashiroya should compensate him in cash. The two sides disagreed over the exchange rate between the Korean and Japanese currencies, and the deduction of Kim's travel and “souvenir” costs from the advance money. Eventually the debate among the Japanese officers in Tokyo, Saga, and Seoul moved on to whether an agent from Tashiroya needed to make another visit to Seoul in order to negotiate directly with Kim so as to settle the issue. The Japanese officers in Seoul who were relaying the messages were sympathetic to Kim, who “almost looked like he was fainting.”⁶⁷

66 Monzaemon and Sato to Nagamine Yakichi (governor of Saga), September 7, 1893. DAJP 3.3.7.16.

67 Sugimura to Hayashi, October 20, 1893. DAJP 3.3.7.16.

Sugimura, the Japanese consul, suggested that Nakamura should make a stop at Seoul while he travelled between Japan and China—a reasonable suggestion given that the *Genkai Maru* connecting Tianjin and Nagasaki went through Inchon. This proposal received support from Hara Takashi, the chief of the commerce division (Tsūshōkyoku) of the foreign ministry in Tokyo. The Japanese officers were alarmed by Kim's suggestion that he might file a lawsuit against Tashiroya. Ōtori Keisuke, the plenipotentiary minister to Korea, hesitated to consider this "a normal lawsuit" because of the involvement of the government bodies. He was also beginning to worry that this quarrel might have wider repercussions and lead to a general hostility among Korean diplomats towards Japan. Ōtori thus proposed to Mutsu Munemitsu, the foreign minister, that Tashiroya should the affair to a quick end by paying back a part of the advance immediately and the rest in instalments.⁶⁸ In clear contrast to Monzamon's relations with the Saga Domain, Tashiroya at the end of the nineteenth century was unable to draw on the support of the Meiji government.

After repeated requests, the Tashiro family finally agreed to send Nakamura to Seoul in March 1894, but he may have failed to show up in person. The person who did meet Kim in Seoul in early April was a man by the name of Tashiro Shōzaburō, representing Tashiroya in what was apparently his first visit from Nagasaki to Seoul.⁶⁹ It is unclear whether Nakamura accompanied Shōzaburō.⁷⁰ Whether Nakamura was present or not, Shōzaburō and Kim concluded a new agreement on April 30, 1894, witnessed by a Japanese consular officer, as can be confirmed by the sealed original document that survives in a Korean archive.⁷¹

68 Ōtori to Mutsu, January 5, 1894. DAJP 3.3.7.16.

69 DAJP 3.8.5.8 Reel 10. This is his first appearance on the passport application record in Nagasaki. He is listed as thirty-two years and six months old, and heading for China for commercial purposes. It is curious that he put China, rather than Korea, as the destination. One possible explanation is that he was going to visit Tashiroya's branches in China after negotiating with Kim, but this cannot be confirmed from the available sources.

70 The passport records in Nagasaki in the corresponding period only have an entry for "Nakamura Yū," coming from the same town as Tashiroya's Nagasaki branch, but stating that he was going to Pusan for fishery. This might have been Tashiroya's Nakamura using a false identity, or he might have come directly from China, as suggested by Sugimura, in which case the trip would not appear in the Japanese archive. DAJP 3.8.5.8. Reel 10.

71 *Chūkan Nihon kōshikan kiroku* 駐韓日本公使館記録 vol. 11, 4. This might have been his first overseas trip, as his name had not appeared in the passport applications record in Nagasaki in the previous years.

Considering Tashiroya's shortcomings, Kim seemed surprisingly gracious in concluding this new agreement with Shōzaburō.⁷² Instead of getting back the advance money at once, he agreed to receive 235.46 yen within five months, and the remaining 1,000 yen, with his personal travel costs deducted, in instalments over the next two years. The matter remained unsolved even after the Sino–Japanese War (which Shōzaburō mentioned in one letter addressed to a municipal officer of Saga as an excuse for not “bothering the officers with this trivial matter”).⁷³ Shōzaburō promised to go to Korea again, but it is unlikely that he ever did. Well into 1896, the foreign ministries of the two countries were discussing the possibility of civil litigation, though by this point it would have been very low on the agenda of both governments. Tashiroya's general lack of revenue from other sources and the drastic fall of what was once the Saga Domain's most powerful porcelain dealer must have been the core reason for the company's refusal to refund down payments, thereby also forfeiting further business opportunities in Korea.

Conclusion

The emergence of Tashiroya, an Arita porcelain wholesaler in the East Asian market, was a product of the Saga Domain's need to finance military and economic reform in the 1850s. Perceived external pressure and the need to tap into the overseas market fostered the development of Tashiroya's enterprise. In the subsequent decades, Tashiroya's success or failure in the treaty port trade depended heavily on its relationship with the authorities. Japanese ministries, Qing city magistrates, and the Korean royal court all impacted the fate of the family in one way or another. Before 1868, the Saga Domain's licence system had protected Tashiroya's overseas export, but afterwards, Tashiroya received less and less political favour. It tried out new products, such as electric insulators and roof tiles, but ultimately neither was able to secure the company's future. Especially consequential in hindsight were the failure of a patent application for the insulator, which led them into a price war in China, and the order of roof tiles from the Korean court, which brought down the East Asian operations of the family.

Among the Tashiros, the only one who came out of these tumultuous decades in fine shape and achieved some fame and fortune was

72 Uchida (Seoul consulate) to Hayashi, February 15, 1895. DAJP 3.3.7.16.

73 Shōzaburō to Takasu Kin (Nishimatsuura Country), April 3, 1895. DAJP 3.3.7.16.

Ichirōji, another adopted son of Keiemon, and a brother of Genpei and Gōsaku. In contrast to the rest of the family, all of whom relied on the East Asian market, Ichirōji, operating from his Yokohama branch after 1867, successfully tapped into the *Japonisme* boom in the Western world. By the time he died in 1902, Ichirōji was a well-respected figure in the local business community. A Japanese commemorative publication celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Yokohama lauded him for his contribution to Japanese porcelain. The book extolled his efforts in touring around Japan encouraging the export of porcelain. He studied the Western market and accumulated years of experience, to the point that “foreign visitors would normally go to his Nagoya branch to observe the production, and our nation’s exporters asked him about market trends, amounting to what has to be called a great impact.”⁷⁴ Yet the archival records in Arita are strangely silent about this man, who could have offered support to the rest of the family in the trying times of the 1890s.

Other members of the family faded away unnoticed. Sukesaku died in 1890. Genpei died in Shanghai in 1893. Monzaemon, already frail and unfit for taking up difficult negotiations with Kim, passed away in 1900. The Shanghai branch lasted into the twentieth century, but it lost the significance of days past. When, in 1942, the Japanese settler association (*kyoryūmindan*) in Shanghai celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary, its commemorative publication of thirteen hundred pages made only one passing reference to Tashiroya, without giving any individual names.⁷⁵ Also telling is the entry for Tashi Shōten in *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Ceramics*, published in 2002. It introduces the shop as “based in Yokohama City, Kanagawa.” The rest of the entry focuses on this Yokohama branch, as well as the Nagoya branch that became the headquarters around the end of the nineteenth century. There is no mention at all of Monzaemon, Genpei, Sukesaku, or their business in China or Korea.⁷⁶

There is one place, however, where Monzaemon’s name is alive today. It is within the circle of antique porcelain collectors. Elaborate Arita pottery marked at the bottom “Hichōzan Shinpo 肥磔山信甫,” denoting

74 Tadakichi Morita, *Kaikō gojūnen kinen Yokohama seikō meiyokan* 開港五十年記念横浜成功名譽鑑 (Yokohama: Yokohama Shōkyō Shinpōsha, 1909), 198–199.

75 Shanhai Kyoryūmindan, ed., *Shanhai kyoryūmindan 35 shūnen kinenshi* 上海居留民団35周年記念誌 (Shanghai: Shanhai Kyoryūmindan, 1942), 42.

76 “Tashi Shōten,” *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Ceramics* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2002), 853.

a commission by Monzaemon, appears in the collections of several Western museums, including the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Victoria Museum in Melbourne, Australia, as well as numerous auctioneers.⁷⁷ These items serve as a reminder of the short-lived foray he had made into the Western market, before his focus turned to the East Asian ports.

The economic and cultural background of Tashiroya's story in the late nineteenth century developed during the previous two centuries, with Korean potters and the Tokugawa's trade in Nagasaki. Once Japan opened the treaty ports, the ensuing network of ships and merchants accelerated the flow of goods across the East Asian waters and provided the direction for businesses like Tashiroya, keen to explore and adapt to overseas markets. Arita porcelain, and the Tashiro family who brought it to the East Asian treaty ports, therefore embodied the transcultural flow of people, capital, material, and information.⁷⁸

77 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/52363> [Accessed on February 16, 2018]; <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1453409> [Accessed on February 16, 2018].

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