

Eikun (Saitō Shuzō)

In the late eighteenth century, the Saitō family established a kimono and clothing shop in Fushimi named Izutsuya Ihei. Before the arrival of steam trains, travel to Kyoto was done by boat, and the shop's location on the waterfront was ideal for selling goods and souvenirs to travelers. However, when the Tōkaidō Main Line was built in 1889, traffic to the store dwindled, and in 1895 the ninth generation of the family switched the shop's trade to sake production. Saitō Shuzō has produced high-quality, Fushimi-style sake ever since.

In the period leading up to World War II, the rice used in most Fushimi sake was of the Iwai variety, a difficult grain to cultivate that is only grown in Kyoto Prefecture. By the early 1990s, Iwai had fallen out of use almost entirely, but Saitō Shuzō pioneered its reintroduction with spectacular success. Other local breweries followed suit.

Iwai rice dissolves quickly during the fermentation process, making it difficult to use, but the company's brewers were able to overcome the technical issues and produce a sake of great delicacy and refinement.

Saitō Shuzō's flagship sake is called "Eikun." It was sold first under the brands Yanagi Masamune and Ōtaka but then renamed in 1915 to celebrate the ascension of the Taishō Emperor (1879–1926) to the Chrysanthemum Throne three years earlier. The kanji characters used to write the name are *ei*, which means "outstanding" or "heroic," and *kun*, which was taken from the ninth-generation owner's posthumous Buddhist name.