

Otabi Festival Children's Kabuki 2019
Kyo-machi: "Breaking the Seal" from
The Love Messenger of Yamato Highway
恋飛脚大和往来 封印切の場
Koi Bikyaku Yamato Orai – Fuin Kiri no Ba



This play is based on real events, and is set in the Shinmachi pleasure district of Osaka.

Chubee is the son of farmer Magoemon, hailing from the tiny village of Ninokuchi of Yamato Province (present-day Nara Prefecture). Chubee's hardworking ethic has been acknowledged by his employers, the Osaka courier company *Kameya*, who have chosen to adopt him into the family. In turn, Chubee has renounced his previous family and his name has been struck off the family register.

After a meeting with his business associates, Chubee is invited to a gathering with them at the *Izutsuya* pleasure house in Shinmachi. There he meets the courtesan **Umegawa** for the first time. He is utterly besotted with her and begins to visit her frequently.

As these visits continue, the head of Kameya grows concerned about the future of his company. He betroths Osuwa to Chubee, hoping that it will stop Chubee's visits to Shinmachi. However, Chubee remains devoted to Umegawa, and even decides to pay off her exorbitantly high contract to secure her freedom. Chubee has already placed a deposit of 50 *ryo*, but as a mere adopted son, was not able to gather the remaining 200 *ryo* within the required time frame. In fact, the deadline passed just the day before, while he was working.

Mid-way through courieriing the 300 *ryo* he was entrusted with, Chubee makes a stopover at the *Izutsuya*. With the blessing of the proprietress **Oen**, he secretly meets with Umegawa in a small room on the mezzanine. Just as they head upstairs, **Hachiemon** also stops by the house with the intention of buying over Umegawa's debt in petty revenge. Hachiemon had been rejected by the head of Kameya, and he begins to disparage Chubee with malicious gossip. Chubee, who had overheard everything, runs downstairs in a fit of rage. His pride is on the line, and during their banter, rips open the money envelope to prove a point. This horrifies the onlookers, an act like that would be considered embezzlement, and was punishable by death.

Accepting their fate, the couple leave hand-in-hand, disappearing into the night.

Notes:

1. Japanese families sometimes adopted sons with the intention of making them the next successor or heir, often through marriage to a biological daughter of the family.
2. A family register or *koseki* is a record of a family lineage and relationships. It functions as a proof of identity, certificate of birth, marriage and death. This practice is still conducted today.
3. While an exact modern conversion is difficult, 1 *ryo* or gold piece would be at minimum the equivalent of ¥100,000 today. Depending on the period, it could have been as high as ¥300,000.