

Twanging Bows and Throwing Rice: Warding Off Evil in Medieval Japanese Birth Scenes

Yui Suzuki

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Room 301, 3F, Building 10 Yotsuya Campus,
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Birthing scene from *The Hungry Ghosts Scroll* (Gaki zōshi), 12-13th century. Tokyo National Museum

Although a transformational life experience, childbirth has not received much focused attention in Japanese art history. In medieval Japan, birthing scenes were often inserted into medieval picture scrolls (emaki) to evoke the larger Buddhist notion of suffering. Despite the long established practice of medicine in Japan, these scenes reveal that the upper echelons of society relied heavily on multifarious networks of ritual specialists and their magico-religious rites during childbirth. This talk will examine images of the diverse performances by religious professionals and the reasons why such elaborate measures were taken to ensure the safety of mother and child.

Yui Suzuki is Associate Professor of Japanese art at the University of Maryland. She has taught at the Department of Art History and Archaeology since 2006. Suzuki is a specialist in Japanese Buddhist art and her research explores issues of Japanese religiosity and its manifestations in visual/material culture. She is the author of *Medicine Master Buddha: The Iconic Worship of Yakushi in Heian Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), and her essays have appeared in *Archives of Asian Art*, *RES* and other scholarly publications. Suzuki's most recent research examines images of ritual objects and practices of spirit possession and childbirth during the Heian and Kamakura periods.

Lecture in English / No prior registration necessary

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