

THE *KATSURAME*

PROFESSIONALIZATION, LEGITIMATION, AND GENDER IN EDO JAPAN

The *katsurame* were a group of women outside of Kyoto who practiced matrilineal succession and fulfilled a wide variety of occupations: they were fishmongers, religious specialists, entertainers, military camp aids, and prostitutes. In this talk, I begin by teasing apart the various professional threads that define the *katsurame*, charting the history of their multifaceted job description and drawing comparisons to other professions occupied by women. In the Edo period, they claimed to be descended from Empress Jingū's midwives, connecting their work to various threads of her narrative. I examine the two items most frequently cited in their references to Jingū: the *katsurame*'s distinctive headdress, and the maternity sash (*haraobi*) from which it is held to have originated. These were not only tools of their trade, but important woven objects connected to the labor of other women and to significant childbirth rituals. I argue that by tracing their roots to Empress Jingū, the *katsurame* gained further legitimacy and renown as professionals in an increasingly diverse world of working women.

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