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PREFACE

Numerous myths of Gods and Goddesses, including androgynous figures, reflect the dichotomous recognition of the world common to humanity since ancient times. Comparing academic interest in the two subjects, one can find a remarkable increase in Goddess studies since the late 1990s, undoubtedly intertwined with the development of feminist studies. The growing awareness of environmental issues has simultaneously encouraged a rediscovery of the relationship between humans and the archetypal Goddess, namely, the Earth Mother. However, the persona of the Goddess encompasses multifaceted roles—nurturer, lover, and, even destroyer—and her status is subject to change depending on historical, cultural, and political contexts. To some extent, the dynamism of representation and transformation might suggest the vitality and resilience inherent in the image of the Goddess as a source of life.

This volume on “Goddesses in Asia” forms part of Akiko Nozawa’s 2023–2025 research project of KAKENHI (Grant Number: 23K00235), supported by JSPS/Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, in collaboration with Nasution’s local team of the Universitas Negeri Surabaya. The joint research specifically focuses on the Indonesian belief in heavenly nymphs called *bidadari*, which became a key issue during Nozawa’s anthropological study on medieval Hindu-Javanese cultural heritage since 2016. The collective memories of *bidadari* have been transmitted by multiple media such as *lontar* manuscripts, depictions on temple reliefs, and performing arts. To be precise, *bidadari* is not a kind of Goddess but a female spirit who mediates the two worlds of deities and humans. The significance of this imaginary being is seen in its close relationship with nature, particularly water, forests, and celestial objects, as is implicitly or explicitly represented in local narratives and practices. In addition, Indonesian *bidadari* folktales have remarkable similarities with many human-nymph marriage tales throughout Asia, including the Japanese *Hagoromo* tale. With an aim to promote both environmental consciousness and intercultural empathy, this review therefore expands its scope to Asian Goddesses and presents a variety of papers by Japanese and Indonesian researchers.

The six papers by Japanese researchers cover a wide range of subjects and research areas. Related to the theme of heavenly nymphs, A. Nozawa (Nagoya University, Nanzan University, and the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature) takes up the Balinese toponym “*Dedari*” (Indonesian *bidadari*) from the viewpoint of anthropology of arts, exploring the symbolic function of the imaginary being in the local ecology through the case of a legendary waterfall involved with the *Rajapala* tale. K. Shirai (Aichi Toho University) highlights the legend of the “Feather Robe Pine” of the Toyo River, Aichi, Japan from the perspective of history education to reveal that formation and transmission have been intertwined with water management, ritual practices, and local politics. H. Iwase (the Japan Society for Folktale Studies) and M. Yoneda (Kikai-chō Board of Education) present a collaborative study of folktale studies and historiography, illuminating the layered imagery and oral aesthetics of the *Tennin Nyōbō-tan* (Japanese celestial maiden wife tales) in the Amami Islands through the relationship with the

tradition of *noro* (priestess) and *yuta* (female shaman), as well as representations in lullabies and *kuduchi/kudoki* (narrative songs). T. Sakai (Association of Asian Cultural Properties Cooperation Japan) discusses ancient bathing monuments with female deity statues in Indonesia with reference to long-standing archaeological research. While examining the structural changes of the fountain system in Java and Bali, the study explores the relationship between water architecture and female deity worship via comparison with cases in other areas, such as Cambodia and India. The article on religious studies by T. Tanaka (Chukyo University) takes up the case of the *Kedia Sabha* (association for the *Kedia* lineage) in Colonial India, where an invented family goddess supported both the economic and social survival of the Indian merchant community (*Marwaris*) of the era. The interdisciplinary study by A. Goto (KIKAI Institute for Coral Reef Sciences), based on maritime anthropology and cultural astronomy, presents an advanced methodology to interpret astronomical phenomena discernible from folklore, myths, and rituals. It does so by using astronomical data and celestial simulations, focusing on the *Ryukyu* culture in the Okinawa Islands: the intersection of the Japanese archipelago, the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, and the islands of Southeast Asia.

The Indonesian contributors offer complementary viewpoints that emphasize folklore as a dynamic intersection of cultural memory, ecology, and tourism. Nasution (Universitas Negeri Surabaya) investigates "Memories of Angels and the Changing Landscape of the Sacred: Folklore, Ecology, and Tourism at Lake Rowobayu in the '*Desa Penari*,'" analyzing the integration of collective memories of *bidadari* within sacred landscapes and their negotiation in modern tourism development. The study elucidates the tensions between preservation, belief, and economic interest by contextualizing folklore within ecological transformation and cultural commodification. Septina Alrianingrum (Universitas Negeri Surabaya) examines the Local Wisdom Values of the *Jaka Tarub* and *Bidadari* Sites in East Java concerning Environmental Ecology Sustainability, emphasizing narrative ethics and environmental values. Her research emphasizes the role of folklore traditions as a cultural framework that delineates moral obligations to nature and fosters sustainable interactions between local communities and their environments. Aditya Indrawan (Universitas Mahasaraswati) presents "Mapping of Angel Sites: Optimization of Folklore in the Field of Tourism in East Java" from the perspective of tourism studies. By mapping locations linked to *bidadari* narratives, the paper illustrates the capacity of folklore-based spatial analysis to enhance culturally sensitive tourism development while safeguarding the symbolic significance of sacred sites. Together, these Indonesian studies complement the Japanese contributions by illustrating how memories of heavenly nymphs are locally grounded, environmentally embedded, and socially negotiated in present-day contexts.

All the cases presented herein illuminate vestiges of interactions between humans and the world accumulated over the long course of history. Through its exploration of various female deities from diverse specialties, we believe that this volume will contribute to the development of interdisciplinary studies on history and culture, and we would like to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who cooperated in the publication.

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