

## EDITORIAL

This issue of the *Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities* brings together three studies covering topics that on first sight don't have much in common. The general section of this issue contains a comparative literary essay on three Western and Thai dystopian novels, while the two papers in the themed section take a detailed look at little known communities in Northern Thailand. As divergent as the topics addressed in the three papers may be, they share the overall theme of identity construction and maintenance in human society. Together they form a varied but connected mosaic on the human social condition in the present age. The broad picture drawn in the first paper is complemented by specific case studies in the themed section.

### 1. Human and posthuman identity

In the first paper of this issue, Isaraporn Pissard presents a comparative study of three science-fiction or near-future novels dealing with large-scale developments set in motion by man and threatening the identity of human society in its deepest roots. Human-made crises, ranging from wars and seemingly unbounded capitalism to environmental destruction and climate change, dominate much of the public discourse. All these pose fundamental threats to the future existence of human culture and society as we know it and often lead to individual anxiety.

Given the importance of the challenges faced by humanity in the 21st century, it is not surprising that these are part of many pieces of modern art, including literature. The three novels examined in the present paper, *Generation of Hopelessness* (2019) by Thai author Jidanun Lueangpiansamut, *Klara and the Sun* (2021) by British author Kazuo Ishiguro, and *The Windup Girl* (2009) by American author Paolo Bacigalupi, highlight different aspects of what has been termed "posthuman" issues (Nayar, 2014). Non-human beings, both artificial and biological, are presented as counterparts to humans, providing a platform for deep reflections on what it is that makes human identity and how it can be saved from the potentially disastrous developments.

### 2. At the crossroads of peoples, languages, and cultures – histories and identities in Northern Thailand

Northern Thailand or Lan Na, bordering Siam, Myanmar, Laos, and China, has for centuries served as a hub and melting pot for peoples, languages, and cultures. Trade routes from China to the Andaman Sea and Siam passed through the area, bringing in not only commercial goods, but also a great variety of cultures and traditions, peoples and languages. This led to a vastly diverse society, in which Tai speakers came to dominate the irrigable lowland areas, while groups belonging to other language families settled in the mountains and highlands. One of these groups are the formerly dominant and now legendary Lua' (Phrommathep 2016). The Lua' were probably Austroasiatic speakers of the Palaungic group, now mostly spoken in Shan State of Myanmar and adjacent areas of China, remnants of which are the present-day Lawa found in communities scattered across Northern Thailand. Burmese rule over large parts of Lan Na from the 16th to the 18th century strengthened ties with cultures under Burmese influence, adding to the diversity of the area (Ongsakul, 2005).

Shifting centers of power and fuzzy boundaries were part of the historical entity known as Lan Na, which only became delimited with the rise of nation states in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Lan Na was gradually integrated into the Kingdom of

Thailand. At the same time, the spread of lowland Tai/Thai culture to more remote areas increased gradually, though without fully assimilating local traditions. This is seen in reports by foreign travelers in the area from the 19th century (for example Hallett, 1890; Grabowsky and Turton, 2003), and local cultures and identities are still maintained by many societies in the area even today. The history of Lan Na is reflected in the present linguistic and cultural landscape, as well as in the numerous local chronicles and legends kept alive. Some of these legends have been transmitted in writing, like the *Chiang Mai Chronicle*, the *Mūlasāsanā*, and the *Cāmadevīvaṃsa*, besides numerous *phuen mueang* (local chronicles) of various towns and polities across Lan Na (Wyatt and Wichienkeo, 1995; Swearer and Premchit, 1998; Na Nakhon and Tiukhiang, 2019; Ongsakul, 2022). Written traditions are mostly found in Tai groups using *tham* or related scripts (Ongsakul and Masuhara, 2002). Other local histories and legends live on as oral tradition only, as is the case with most highland peoples who lack indigenous writing systems. While these local histories have long been neglected as mere ‘legends’ without real historical value, they play an important role in the conceptualization of the history and identity of their owners, besides undoubtedly containing historical truths, however well hidden in the embellished and mythicized narratives (Chuwaen, 2019).

Despite being part of centralized Thai administration and education, the Northern Thailand area retains its own dynamics with numerous non-Thai languages and cultures still alive, especially, but not exclusively in rural communities. Continuing transborder exchange with neighboring countries adds to the diversity found in Northern Thailand. Local Lan Na traditions retain their role in the cultural make-up of the area as well as of Thailand as a nation state, albeit increasingly assimilated to central Thai customs and language in most urban contexts. Recent years have seen a revival and restrengthening of local cultures, promoted by the central government in an attempt not only to preserve local heritage as an important part of the national identity, but also as added (economic) value for domestic and international tourism activity.

This themed issue of the *Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities* presents two research papers on little known communities of Lan Na with connections beyond the boundaries of modern Thailand, namely Prai and Iu Mien. Both groups are rarely, if ever, mentioned in local chronicles and traditional legends or in academic research, which adds to the relevance of the studies presented here. The papers included in this issue highlight the ethnic and social, as well as linguistic diversity outside the dominating Thai/Tai family.

In the first article F. Jason Diller, Douglas M. Fraiser, and Kari Jordan Diller focus on the construction of Prai identity as represented in indigenous legends and put it into perspective with outsiders’ perceptions of the community. The Prai, an Austroasiatic people of the Khmuic group spoken in present-day Thailand and Laos, are commonly classified as Lua’ by lowland Thais of the area, referring to the legendary indigenous pre-Tai population of Lan Na, though they belong to a different group within Austroasiatic.

The second paper published here presents a detailed analysis of a mountain passport for Iu Mien people in Lan Na, written in Chinese. The passport refers to the origin of the traditionally recognized twelve (possibly thirteen) clans of the Iu Mien, the knowledge of which is decreasing in the community due to several factors, including the inaccessibility of documents like the one presented here. In addition to the original Chinese text of the manuscript, the study by Daniel Arisawa and Chayanin Phanrisuwan offers a translation in Iu Mien both in Romanized and Thai-based orthographies, as well as in IPA transcription. This makes the document directly accessible to the language community for the first time.

Besides the community benefit achieved by this presentation, the paper also provides material in a little known and little described language.

Both papers offer rare glimpses into the construction and maintenance of history and identity by small communities challenged by strong centralizing state powers. The indigenous conception of a community's identity based on mythical origins is shared by many groups in inland Southeast Asia, with partly overlapping legendary narratives found in different societies. The Iu Mien, as seen in the manuscript presented here, shows closer affinity with the Chinese cultural sphere, while the Prai origin myths are more aligned with the general Mainland Southeast Asian pattern. Together, they show the cultural and social diversity still found in Lan Na, underlining the area's wide connections beyond the traditional boundaries as well as its being embedded firmly in the cultural sphere of Mainland Southeast Asia. Present-day Lan Na is still an important crossroads and hub of peoples and cultures with a great variety of communities retaining their own beliefs, traditions, and languages, often across national boundaries, despite the advancing integration into the nation states. Easier communication with and access to all corners of the region offer both benefits and challenges for the indigenous cultures. The increasing and accelerating spread of national cultural narratives into more remote areas makes the documentation of these communities with all their cultural assets more urgent today than ever. At the same time, the availability of modern technology renders this task more feasible and easier than ever before.

The themed section of this issue of the *Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities* hopes to make a contribution to the ongoing efforts of documenting local cultures and languages of Lan Na.

Mathias Jenny

Guest Editor

Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities Volume 3, Issue 2 (November 2023)

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**Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities**

To promote the importance of interdisciplinary studies and the coalescence between humanities and other areas such as the sciences—natural, social, or applied—economics, and business administration, the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, is launching *Darshikā: Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities*. This peer-reviewed bi-annual journal aims to disseminate novel interdisciplinary studies and to bridge the gap between humanities and other disciplines, emphasizing the critical role of humanities in any field of study's discussion and innovation. Additionally, it is hoped that the journal will become recognized in international academic journal indexes, such as Scopus, within four years.

**Objectives**

To promote the importance of interdisciplinary studies and the coalescence between humanities and other areas

**Journal Standards**

To comply with the standards for academic journals in the Social Sciences and Humanities set by the OHEC and TRF, the editorial board consists of professors and doctoral experts who have been conducting research continuously. The editorial board members are mainly from external institutions and partly from internal institutions. All submitted articles are double-blind peer reviewed by at least two reviewers. The journal is published every May and November

**Article screening policy**

1. The journal accepts interdisciplinary articles that are written in English and that discuss any topics concerning the humanities in relation to other areas. The articles can be research articles, academic articles, review articles, or book reviews.
2. All submitted articles are reviewed by at least two reviewers in related fields and are approved by the editorial board.
3. Authors must comply with regulations and satisfy conditions set by the editorial board, and agree that for the final production phase, the articles' formatting can be modified or adjusted by the co-editors in chief.

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the assessment of academic quality and contributions. Authors will be notified whether or not the articles will be sent out for review within 15 days. The editorial team sends qualified articles out for review. Each article will be assessed by at least two reviewers in related fields to determine its quality and contributions. The review process is double blind. It takes approximately 20 - 40 days. Based on the reviewers' comments, the co-editors may accept, ask authors for revision, or reject articles. Authors will be informed about the review results within 15 days after the editorial office receives the reviews from the reviewers.

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