

## Editorial Preface

This collection essays and research articles has been organised in order to celebrate 60 years of Chiang Mai University's faculty of Humanities. It was an honour to be asked to arrange, compile and edit this volume, and I sincerely hope that the following essays are testament to the abiding relevance of one of the university's largest faculties. Amidst the many global challenges that currently face our planet—ecological, political, demographic, technological and ethical—the humanities continue to serve as a bastion for critical enquiry and free speech at a time where these harbingers of what Karl Popper termed the “open society” are surely under threat.

The recently debated age of the “Anthropocene”<sup>1</sup> has culminated in the burgeoning of AI in many forms, some of which, such as the LLM (Large Language Model), in themselves cast a concerning light over the future of ethical and honest scholarship. At CMU, we hope to meet these challenges head on, with initiatives like the *Sustainable Humanities Programme*, and the *Digital Humanities Centre*. The incentive is to incorporate inevitable change, whilst retaining the highest standards of scholarship—something that is often a challenge in-itself. However, moving with the technical times also means keeping focus upon traditional scholarly fields of enquiry, and it's in this sense that what follows illustrates our continued commitment to scholarly integrity and quality.

The following essays and research papers adumbrate and utilise more traditional themes such as political ethics, descriptive linguistics, critical theory, cultural studies and pedagogical studies, while incorporating newer trends within the purview of the humanities, such as the study of “World Literature” and postcolonial theory. This collection reminds us of the relevance of the humanities within an ever-changing geo-political landscape.

After 22 years at CMU, I've personally seen many faces come and go, whilst gradually making Chiangmai a home for my family. As a corollary to my own lived experience within SE Asia, these papers likewise reflect upon the social integration, hybridity, and morality that are all at the heart of the mission statement of the humanities. This is deftly articulated in the following pages. Mainstream cultural ideology, the resilience of minority cultures and language registers are all critiqued in this collection, culminating in a volume that addresses the multifarious aspects of what it means to be human (or posthuman) in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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This Special Issue commences with a paper that has been developed from a talk at the *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship Annual Conference in London, Ontario, on May 20, 2023*, by Patrick Keeney. The essay introduces this collection as it discusses a topic that is of great interest to many academics and writers who feel that current discourse in Western universities has been subjected to a new orthodoxy (doxa) that needs to be at least debated in order to possibly realign what were once thought traditional academic standards. It's arguable that this doxa has yet to reach academic life in SE Asia but in coming years this may well be the reality of university life in Asia. The article has been included because of its current political

<sup>1</sup> The original proposed age of the “Anthropocene” designated the period from 1952 as the date since when there has been planet-changing events instigated by humanity; it would have superseded the Holocene epoch, which designates the 11,700 years of stable climate since the last ice age and during which human civilisation arose. The International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) however voted against this proposal in 2024.

relevance and is not intended to represent the views of the editorial team. There was debate with peer reviewers and editorial staff about whether to include this talk but in the end, we decided it is of enough current relevance, and of a high enough scholarly standard, to open the special issue.

The essay itself analyses the current notions of individual liberal “rights talk”, while contesting that a more communitarian ethical discourse is an alternative register within which to frame modern liberal dialogue. The argument is that the discourse of individual “rights talk” has become so pervasive in liberal parlance, that in seminal institutions such as university, academic free speech is now under greater threat than ever. The essay calls for a wider ranging moral vocabulary in which to situate public morality—as currently exemplified in the institutional conduct of Western universities. It perhaps serves as a timely reminder of debates we may be having in Asian universities in the coming years.

The second essay in the volume moves the focus away from university life in general (as it's currently viewed in the Western sphere), to Chinese cinema. In “Confidence in the strong motherland: heroism, patriotism and Chinese policies in the ‘*Wolf Warrior*’ films”, researcher Nuttawadee Jensiripon discusses the popular *Wolf Warrior* series of Chinese movies. She discusses how the movies ideologically represent President Xi Jinping's visions for the “Belt and Road” initiative and how they hegemonically signify current Chinese imperial ambitions. Her excellent and timely analysis helps us to read more clearly the current ideological ambitions of 21<sup>st</sup> Century China, as exemplified by mainstream Chinese cinema.

In *Hybridity in Rattawut Lapcharoensap's “Farangs” and “Don't Let Me Die in This Place”* Isaraporn Pissa-ard uses postcolonial theory to assess Thai-Western social politics as portrayed in two of Thai American writer, Rattawut Lapcharoensap's short stories, “Farangs” and “Don't Let Me Die in This Place.” She outlines the hybridity that is at work in these stories and, pace Homi K. Bhabha and Ien Ang, offers a more positive set of interpersonal dynamics that allow the growth of these relationships and the transcendence of the initially colonial binarism to a more equitable social relationship. This scholarship not only uses currently popular postcolonial theory in a similar manner to Jensiripon, but it also illustrates how theories such as those of Bhabha and Ang go beyond the more prescriptive earlier theory of Edward Said.

In “Exploring the Representation of Male Homosexuals in Thai Boy Love Series through Critical Discourse Analysis” Dechathorn Pojchanaphong, and Theerapong Kongduang write about the sexual politics and cultural impact of the Boy Love (BL) series in Thailand. Combining the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Norman Fairclough, the paper assesses the cultural impact of this recent discursive practice. It also examines the ideological power dynamics within this genre, in the hope that more realistic portrayals can be created in the BL series in the future.

Jumping back in time, James Batcho presents us with a question that one would be justified to consider rhetorical: “Is Music a Language? A Contemporary Analysis of a Romantic Notion.” This essay delves into issues close to my heart as a scholar of Romanticism. The question is timeless—as is the subject itself. Building on work of scholars such as Andrew Bowie, Batcho uses elements such as German Romantic Theory (*Frühromantik*) and structuralist theory to elaborate upon this contentious notion; drawing on theoretical modes such as the sublime and semiotics, he argues that music has a structural form all of its own but it's not quite a language in the traditionally accepted sense—although there is still residual ambiguity, which defies a clear apodictic answer to this question.

Ram Prasansak's article, *The Emergence of A Child of the Northeast in the Capitalist World-Economy: Reading Isan/Thai Literature as World Literature* delineates a mode of literary reading that challenges more putatively parochial views of Kampoon Boontawee's *A Child of the Northeast* (1976). It accomplishes this by utilizing the Warwick Research Collective and David Damrosch's recent strategic analyses of *World Literature*. It further employs the celebrated dialogical theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. Combining these notions, the particularity of Isaan identity in the form of a bildungsroman is located geopolitically in relation to the postmodern tendency of late capital. Tensions are encapsulated through the application of Bakhtin's work on "chronotope" and bildungsroman deftly illustrating how novelistic discourse captures these inherent dilemmas of capitalist modernity and its fraught relation with minority cultures. As with Pissa-ard's essay, Prasansak illustrates how the protagonist is a round character that fully negotiates the relationship between tradition and modernity, reflecting Isaan's own geopolitical development.

The are a number of excellent theoretical research articles that make up the latter part of this ceremonial collection. They commence with Syed Iftiqr Rahman's excellent and timely linguistic analysis of the *Nocte* language. The paper connects nicely with the multicultural analyses of both Pissa-ard and Prasansak. In terms of sound linguistic analysis, and with an eye towards the important preservation of the minority *Nocte* language, Rahman has produced a highly original examination of the *Nocte* language, which belongs to the Northern Naga subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman family. A morphological analysis, the paper examines agreement words and their functional meanings as they signify tense, aspect, mood and negation. The study further delineates the complexity of negative constructions in *Nocte*; constructions that vary according to syntactic, pragmatic and grammatical constraints. This crucial study locates *Nocte* within the wider family of Tibeto-Burman languages, by way of a post-verbal morphological analysis. It opens the pathway to further study of this minority language, whilst significantly building upon current linguistic research in this area.

In Shiyi Zhang and Chalermporn Kongjit's research paper *Knowledge Elicitation for Spoken English Teaching through the Design Thinking Process*, the authors have researched Chengdu public junior schools to ascertain why spoken English is not given the attention it deserves. The research utilizes the five steps of the "Empathize-Define-Ideate-Prototype-Test" in *design thinking* to explore causes and problems that are attributable to this current situation. The paper adumbrates the gap between actual and ideal spoken English and provides possible future direction for teachers of spoken English.

Similarly, in "An Analysis of Grammatical Content in Teaching Materials Used by High School Spanish Teachers in Northeastern Thailand," Khon Khaen University's Fuangket Tongwanchai, Darikarn Kotchana, and Nanthapong Sukthawee, research the alignment of grammatical content in teaching materials for Spanish classes; using the A1-level grammatical topics outlined in the *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes* (PCIC) as a reference framework. It seems none of the schools follow all the grammar content included within the PCIC. More timely recommendations are made for teachers to collaborate using the PCIC initiative and produce textbooks that meet the A1 standard.

All of these papers combine astute scholarship and aptly illustrate the continuing significance of the humanities in the future archeology of not only Chiang Mai University, but universities across the world. This is the case whether it be in terms of ethical debates, cross-cultural analysis, sexual politics, pedagogical and heuristic considerations, or ethnological-linguistic considerations. The editor hopes that not only will the work within these pages encourage future scholarship of an equally high standard but also encourage future students to engage with this seminal faculty within the ecosystem of this great university. These papers hold the faculty in good stead for another 60 years.<sup>2</sup>

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wayne George Deakin  
Guest Editor  
February, 2025

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Assistant Professor Dr. Pasoot Lasuka for his support in completing this special edition. I also extend thanks to all of the reviewers and authors who sent in and reviewed articles for this issue. I would like above all to thank *Ms. Nattakarn Sanit-in* for her stellar work in preparing this special issue; without her input this project would not have been possible.

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## **Contact Information**

Editorial Board – Chiang Mai University Journal of Humanities

Research Administration, Academic Services, and International Affairs Section

Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University

239 Huay Kaew Road, Suthep, Mueang District, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

Phone: +66 53-943219, +66 53-942345

Email: [humanjournal@cmu.ac.th](mailto:humanjournal@cmu.ac.th)

Website: <https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JHUMANS/index>

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