



# Editorial

Dear Reader,

This year's inaugural editorial is penned against a backdrop of a significant milestone—the Highland Institute's 10th anniversary on 10<sup>th</sup> June. In this past decade, the institute has matured into a reputable, independent research centre, and as a journal under its wing, we are honoured to have participated in this critical decade of growth and maturity.

The institute and the journal perceive research collaboration as a cherished asset in our contemporary era. Navigating the tumultuous transformations underway in Highland Asia - economic, political, social, and indeed climactic - necessitates a certain tenacity for such fundamentals as equitable partnership, quality data, unbiased analysis, and resistance to censorship. Indispensable to truly maintaining this ethos is nurturing a spirit of openness, while maintaining independence from any kind of interference. In a world where the allure of social prestige, profit and the erosion of intellectualism can undermine even the most respected scholarly organisations we take pride in the Highland Institute's and Highlander Journal's steadfast commitment to these values.

This tenth year serves not merely as an anniversary but as a pivotal juncture for introspection and future planning. It presents an opportunity for both the journal and the institute to evaluate the resilience of our shared philosophy and ensure its continued relevance in the upcoming decade. Before delving into the contents of this issue, I'd like to shed light on three initiatives currently spearheaded by the Highland Institute.

MyClimate: Climate Actions, Conflict and Peacebuilding (2021-2026) is a collaborative project with the Danish Institute for International Studies, Nyan Corridor, and the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development at Chiang Mai University. The project aims to improve academic and policy understanding of climate change impacts and conflict dynamics in Myanmar's ethnic border regions. The team employs a blend of digital ethnography and in-situ fieldwork, collaborates with local researchers and organizations, and focuses on the study of customary land use, an intricate intersection of cultural and environmental interests.

Ekologos: Global Environmental Humanities (2022-2026) is a multi-continental collaboration funded by the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education, providing substantial opportunities for institute staff to engage in research in critical climate regions across different continents. By partnering with UiT The Arctic University of Norway, the Institute of Marine Research, Norway, the State University of Campinas UNICAMP, Brazil, RV University, Bangalore, and Doctors For You, Mumbai, the Highland Institute will strive to amplify the voices of local and indigenous communities disproportionately affected by climate change, blurring the lines between research and education, sciences and humanities, academic and traditional knowledge.

Furthermore, Earthkeepers, a project supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), seeks to document traditional ecological knowledge and climate change perceptions

along the Myanmar-Nagaland border. With a dedicated team headed by Catriona Child, Acting Director of the institute, it aims to facilitate discussions about climate justice and food security, while providing resources to address climatic and social challenges effectively. The Earthkeepers project is also committed to bolstering local research capacity, encouraging collaboration, and producing ethnographic materials to benefit all stakeholders.

While the journal values its editorial independence, we celebrate the institute's achievements, and very much look forward to exploring collaboration in publishing, including potential special journal issues. We especially anticipate the rich knowledge drawn from these significant multi-year and multi-dimensional projects requiring a platform for open access, peer-reviewed dissemination.

Shifting now to the present Highlander Journal volume 3, the opening article of this first issue, by Christian Poske, offers an incisive examination of the interactions between colonial administrators and their local interpreters in Nagaland. An ethnomusicologist by training, Poske's extensive fieldwork, guided by his discovery of a series of early Naga sound recordings on wax cylinders in the British Library, provides a fresh perspective on the continuing influence of colonial interactions on social hierarchy in Surumi, offering a unique viewpoint on the lasting impact of colonial domination and racial discrimination.

We then shift to Jop Koopman's insightful study on the transformative power of local legislature on the island of Lombok, Indonesia. Through the examination of *awiq-awiq*, a local practice that imposes heavy penalties for deforestation, Koopman provides a fascinating account of how the installation of such legislature has altered perceptions of sustainability and climate change in the region.

Contributing further to our exploration of the region's complexities, a captivating photo essay presents the lived experiences of recent rural-urban migrants in Nepal. This poignant pictorial account offers insights into the challenges these migrants face in accessing healthcare in urban settings, told through their own lenses and narratives.

This issue also features a comprehensive conference report on the Southeast Asian Frontier (SEAF) #1: Highlands, convened at the Department of Communication, Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII), Yogyakarta. The workshop, co-convened by researchers from various institutions, engaged a diverse group of participants from multiple countries and disciplines. The report provides a detailed account of the workshop proceedings, highlighting the crucial role of academic discourse in driving research and innovation.

The other contributions in this issue, including Catriona Child's thought-provoking perspective in "Irfan's Ghost" and Anna Notsu's insightful review of 'Reworking Culture: Relatedness, Rites, and Resources in Garo Hills, North East India', further enhance our exploration of cultural continuities and transformations in this issue.

Our commitment to publishing high quality open access, peer-reviewed research is echoed in each contribution to this issue, as it will be in each issue to follow. The journey ahead is full of possibilities, and we invite you to join us - as an author, reviewer, or indeed as you do now as a reader - as we continue to explore, in multidisciplinary and comparative fashion, state, culture, and social formation within and beyond Asia.

With warm regards,  
Michael T. Heneise  
Co-Editor