

Summary of Keynote speaker 2: Dr Renie Chow Choy

Journeys Personal, Global, and Transformational: 'Contested heritage' in cathedrals

Dr Renie Chow Choy was the keynote speaker on Wednesday morning. She gave a powerful and thought-provoking lecture entitled *Journeys Personal, Global, and Transformational: 'Contested heritage' in cathedrals*.

Some Christian places of worship in Britain contain memorials that are problematic. These memorials include ones that commemorate individuals and events that have an exclusionary effect on some visitors to our cathedrals and churches. Many of these memorials emphasise the relationship between Christianity and military power, empire or politics.

Whilst many white British visitors may find they are able to ignore, or even just not recognise, symbols of power, supremacy and colonialism found within Christian places of worship, they can be a heavy emotional burden for visitors from ethnic minorities. There is a tendency for the Church of England to prioritise the memorials and objects themselves rather than the effect they have on people viewing them.

Dr Chow Choy talked about the many reasons why people engage in heritage. For some people visiting a church or cathedral is no different from visiting a castle or stately home, and they want these buildings to remain preserved and unchanged. This is a way of engaging with heritage only as entertainment rather than as a means to greater understanding and recognition. Dr Chow Choy referred to Yujie Zhu's 'Ladder of heritage interpretation' (*Heritage Tourism: From Problems to Possibilities*, 2021) which describes this:

- 1) entertainment and consumption
- 2) knowledge and fact sharing
- 3) understanding and recognition
- 4) imagination and reflection
- 5) healing and reconciliation.

Contested memorials can be a way of educating people who do not realise the extent and impact of British colonialism. This can lead to a greater understanding of why the UK is a multicultural country and offer the chance for reflection and then reconciliation. Whilst it may often not be possible or necessary to remove contested memorials, it is possible to use them to educate visitors. Sacred spaces can deepen the dialogue we have with each other and nurture a positive relationship between the living and the dead.

Contested heritage can give an opportunity for healing and reconciliation. In her research and work at St Paul's Cathedral, Southwark Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, Dr Chow Choy worked with groups and individuals, who might not otherwise, for a variety of reasons, have come into this Christian place of worship. The research project supported individuals to engage with and interpret specific and potentially challenging memorials.

For more information about Dr Chow Choy's projects:

'The East India Company at St Paul's Cathedral': <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/east-india-company-st-pauls>

'War and Resistance in the Caribbean':

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/war-and-resistance-in-caribbean-monuments-st-pauls>

'Inclusive Heritage: Implications for the Church of England'

<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/3/360>

For general guidance issued by the C of E:

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Contested_Heritage_in_Cathedrals_and_Churches.pdf