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EXTRACT

**SALVATION, DISCIPLESHIP
AND EVANGELISM**

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Book Forum: Renie Chow Choy's *Ancestral Feeling: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage*¹

Cultural Rearrangement: reconciliation of a war within

Sunny Chen

It was supposed to be a simple book review on Renie Chow Choy's *Ancestral Feeling: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage*. However, after reading her critical view on Eurocentrism in the introductory chapter, her argument about genealogical research in chapter 3, and her articulation of "the complex dynamic between ancestral obligation, intergenerational mobility and Western Christian heritage" (171) in chapter 6, I struggled to focus on writing a scholarly and objective analytical piece. Instead, various memories and emotions swelled up in my mind and heart. Consequently, this book review has inevitably turned into a reflection piece, recollecting parts of my personal journey and piecing together many fragmented thoughts. Regardless, reviewing the book and exercising self-reflection have helped me to see a path to reconcile the different aspects of my identity that I have kept apart since my younger days – as these aspects, or compartments, are immensely conflicting at times.

I was born in Hong Kong when it was still a British colony. During my childhood, my parents attempted to motivate me by occasionally reminding me of the "glorious past" of my ancestors. "For ten generations, your ancestors were Taishi (太師) during the Song Dynasty (宋朝), and as the Dynasty fell, one of them followed the last emperor, Emperor Bing (宋帝昺) escaping to the south." Later, I learned that a Taishi (太師) was an imperial tutor, teacher of an emperor. I am not certain how much impact my parents' iteration have on me, but I recall that when I was older, I asked for proof. "Where is the evidence? Show me the genealogy." Their reply, however, was utterly disappointing: "The genealogy has been lost for several decades." I grew skeptical as those amazing stories sounded more like myths and legends, even borderline fantasies for self-medicating our current mediocracy. "We have a glorious past!" In my mind, my rebellious response was: "So what? It's now totally irrelevant!"

In my twenties, I went to the United States to pursue my graduate studies, and later migrated to Australia. My father passed away in Hong Kong not long after I arrived at the new country that I eventually call home. Due to the distance, I missed the chance to say goodbye to my father when he drew his last breath on his sickbed. It became one of my greatest regrets. More than a decade passed and I was doing my PhD, researching on first century Koiné Greek literature. Suddenly, an unexpected discovery emerged. I accidentally stumbled on the lost genealogy on the internet. A copy of my family's genealogy in digital form had, somewhat

¹ Renie Chow Choy, *Ancestral Feeling: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage* (London: SCM, 2021).

peculiarly, been kept in a library in the State of Utah. When I went through the whole genealogy, I realised that my parents were not lying, those stories were neither myths nor legends, they were real!

In studying my family's genealogy, the most striking discovery was that I was not the first Christian in my family. Despite studying at a Catholic school, I was an atheist until my undergraduate years. To my parents, my newfound Christian faith was regarded as a 'Western infection', clashing with Chinese philosophy and tradition. Moreover, many of my relatives associated Christianity with Western colonial invasion, occupation, and oppression. As a result, it took a very long time for my parents to somewhat accept my 'betrayal.' On the other hand, growing up watching Hollywood movies with my family created an image in my mind where the Western world appeared appealing and fascinating. I wonder if the decision to pursue my graduate studies in America was in part a subconscious attraction to that Western culture. Despite living in America and Australia, both founded through colonisation, it took me a very long time to gradually learn about colonisation and its impact on Indigenous people around the world.

My heritage with the so-called ancestral glorious past, my childhood in a British colony, my own family's disdain for the Christian faith as a Western product introduced through brutal colonisation, my own fondness of the Western culture, my opportunity to study in the West, my migration to a Western country, and my knowledge of colonisation are all intertwined in one big personal hodgepodge. These histories and identities at times clash as I shift from a sense of personal pride to a sense of collective shame. They represent lightness and darkness, tinting and shading my identities. As a result, compartmentalization of my history and identity is always my personal coping strategy.

Reading Choy's work, I was immediately captivated by the mention of William Tyndale as one of the many "great heroes of the faith" (2) in the introductory chapter. I could not agree more with Choy's appropriation in Chapter 2 of Willie James Jennings' account of the integration of colonial dominance into the West's theology: "In Western Europe, the Christian theological imagination was 'woven into processes of colonial dominance'" (58).² The translation of the Tyndale Bible is a good example of this.

Recently, I was invited to present a paper on the topic about multiculturalism in the context of the Uniting Church in Australia. I wanted to touch on the impact of colonisation on multiculturalism. However, I am not an expert on either of the subject matters, since my understanding of colonisation and multiculturalism are at best still emerging. As a scholar of Koiné Greek literature, I decided to present the topic from a different historical lens, investigating the impact of various translation works of ancient Greek literature. One of them was the translation of the Tyndale New Testament in the 16th century CE, the first English translation of the Bible.

William Tyndale translated a version of the Greek New Testament, the *Textual Receptus*, to English in 1526. It was a watershed moment amongst English speaking Christians in the Western world and his translation work is always considered as historically significant and is widely celebrated. Nonetheless, in my research I discovered that there was a dark and sinister association to the work, a lesser-known aspect of the Tyndale

² Choy is drawing from Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale, 2010), 8.

Bible. Throughout my research, I wondered if the Tyndale Bible had unintentionally fueled and justified European colonialism. His translation occurred at the dawn of European colonialism in the 1500s, after the European discoveries of a sea route around southern African coast in 1488 and of America in 1492. The matter that intrigued me was how Tyndale had treated the Greek word ἔθνη (ethnē) in the Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. In two thirds of its twelve occurrences in Matthew, he consistently and accurately translated ἔθνη (ethnē) as “Gentiles.” However, near the end of the Gospel, from chapter 24 onwards, the Greek word was curiously translated as “nations.” I realised that for the first readers of the Tyndale Bible, those “nations” had been portrayed as hostile with unconverted people persecuting Christians. I then questioned if that idea had reinforced the rationale behind colonialism: the European Christians had the right to convert those ‘nations’ recently discovered. Of interest, in the last occurrence of ἔθνη (ethnē) in Mt 28:19, Tyndale translated the final command of Jesus as follows: “Go therfore and teache all nacions.” Subsequent translations of the New Testament followed Tyndale’s rendering of Mt 28:19, including The Great Bible in 1539, the Geneva Bible in 1560, and King James Bible in 1611. I am not certain if Tyndale’s rendering directly fueled the pursuit of the contemporary colonisers who felt justified to invade other lands, carrying a ‘noble’ motive to “teach all the nations.” Nonetheless, there is little doubt that a seismic change took place in the European Christian world 200 years after Tyndale’s work. A new perspective of Mt 28:19 arose due to the word “nations” used in the translation instead of “Gentiles.”

As I ventured further into this history, I learned that William Carey, a renowned Baptist missionary who founded the Baptist Missionary Society in England, made a specific argument in his work in 1792: *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens, in which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered*. He began his thesis by asserting that Christ “commiffioned his apoftkes to Go, and teach all nations,” and then argued that Mt 28:18–20 should be interpreted as the command of Jesus to both his own disciples and all of God’s people throughout all ages. Furthermore, he also considered that it was an ‘opportunity’ for Christ’s mission, which was offered by colonial expansion. The text was subsequently known as “The Great Commission.”

When I connected all the dots that I had observed, I was struck by the possibility that the seed of Carey’s interpretation had been largely based on Tyndale’s peculiar translation of Mt 28:19, rendering ἔθνη (ethnē) as nations instead of Gentiles. Even one of the most celebrated translations in the history of Christianity was stained by its possible link with European colonisation. Hence ironically, a supposedly life-giving work also carries the troubled past of a darker chapter in humanity.

The example of the Tyndale Bible, which is the intertwining of the interpretation of the Bible to spread God’s good message and blind human ambition illustrates the complexity of human history and life experiences. The multifaceted conflicts within myself due to my heritage and my own formation as a product of the meeting and clashing of East and West seem unresolvable. Choy’s argument, however, may provide a new pathway. In chapter 6, she draws on Liu Xiofeng’s idea of “cultural rearrangement” according to which “the relationship between Chinese culture and Western Christian heritage must no longer exist as a negotiation

or a dialogue between cultures, but as an existential transformation” and the two cultures “must not be conceived in terms of inculturation and assimilation but as a full-on ‘cultural rearrangement’” (177).³

As previously mentioned, I always resort to compartmentalisation when confronted with irreconcilable and conflicting thoughts and feelings. Moving forward, I shall attempt to apply Choy’s concept of “cultural rearrangement” in thinking about and understanding my history and identity. As a lover of Western Classical music, at the time of writing this I was listening to Beethoven’s Piano Concerto in C major. So, I will highlight Choy’s thought-provoking challenge at the end of chapter 6.

What we should be expending our energy protesting here is not that the cultural Christians aren’t ‘Christian enough’ or that they have sold out to whiteness; rather, what we ought to be protesting against is the association of the culture of Western history with ethnic whiteness. In the same way that Chinese pianists have now become authoritative interpreters of Beethoven and Chopin, changing the way we experience Western cultural heritage, so it can be with Augustine and Aquinas (178).

In 1985, the Uniting Church in Australia made a historic declaration at its fourth National Assembly meeting, “The Uniting Church is a multicultural church.”⁴ Since then, the Church has been undertaking a journey, charging towards new multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural frontiers. Along the way, the Church has encountered various challenges. Many multicultural communities, existing within the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, navigate their sometimes conflicting identities. Using Choy’s terms, rather than resolving those conflicts through concepts like negotiation, dialogue, inculturation, or assimilation, I propose an alternative approach: cultural rearrangement. As the Uniting Church celebrates the 40th Anniversary of that declaration this year, this new perspective may offer a more effective path forward for the entire Church, along with its multicultural communities.

***Ancestral Feeling*: insisting on the radical translatability of Christianity**

Joy J. Han

In *Ancestral Feeling*, Renie Chow Choy brings to a head the problem of how a white-majority culture has dominated English Christian heritage, despite the fact it was British imperialism that, “having evangelized the people of Asia, Africa and the Americas, galvanized them to believe they were part of the Christianity of England” (27). Choy exposes for us Western Christianity’s enduring notice to those outside the aforesaid white-majority culture that there is no birthright for them. And in order to back the claim of ethnic minority Christians – that so-called Western Christian heritage “is *our* heritage too” – Choy offers us both methodology

³ Choy is here summarising Liu Xiaofeng, “Die akademische Forschung des Christentums im kulturellen System des Kommunismus,” *China heute*, 178-83, and 136 (for the specific reference to “cultural rearrangement”).

⁴ Uniting Church in Australia, “The Uniting Church is Multicultural Church,” *Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, 1985*, accessed March 18, 2025, ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/494. Today, the declaration is widely known as “We are a multicultural church.”

and method, which in turn raise for us greater implications (22). I offer here an exploration of several aspects of Choy's work: first, how her "autobiographical turn" (25) forms the pillar of a correction to the hegemony of Europe as Subject; and second, how her theoretical work presents opportunities to extend the method in the Australian context. Finally I touch upon some of the bigger questions it could pose to our tradition.

Today there are numerous scholarly and popular movements to uplift minority and otherwise non-dominant voices in all arenas, especially in view of nominal decolonisation in the modern era. But despite such conspicuous efforts, we should ask why it is that a subjective turn such as Choy's examination of "ancestral feeling" should at all be introduced as something of a choice to "indulge" (23). So many decades of scholarship have demonstrated that the voice of Reason as championed by the European Enlightenment is not so much a universal mode of objectivity as it is the ideology of a particular Subject – that of Europe – externalised into cultural, political, and economic hegemony. The fact that Choy's autobiographical turn has to be named and defended *as such* demonstrates that the postcolonialist critique has still not landed:⁵ the impersonal mode of academic writing continues to assert itself as being objective and unbiased, while texts that openly declare the singularity of their subjective and cultural determination must apologise for and justify themselves.

Genealogocentrism

Choy's exercise of "ancestral feeling" – that is, her own identification with the Western Christian tradition as subjectively experienced and narrativized from the location of her (non-Western) ethnic inheritance – is subversive. It does not serve merely to supplement or democratize Western Christianity. Instead, her method cuts to the heart of Western Christianity's *genealogocentrism*, if you will: the ideological veneer that renders the cultural and ethnic determinations of white Christians' religious practice to be historically necessary or simply given, such that it is no longer perceived as particular, hence the impersonal and objective air of "religious ancestry" (25). Despite their biological content, genealogical texts necessarily arise from a particular point-in-time and subjective space. Western Christianity's genealogocentrism is what renders white Christians' ancestral identifications to be no longer feeling but instead fact, with the effect that the Other's ancestral feeling can never provide a source of authority or historical significance within the wider tradition.

To draw a perhaps blunt but hopefully illustrative personification: Europe as Subject declares, *When I draw upon my culture and religious tradition, it's Neoplatonism; when you do it – that's syncretism.*⁶ To insist on an autobiographical turn, as Choy does, gives the lie to this Eurocentric conceit.

Antigenealogy

Choy's measured consideration of the rhizome metaphor as *antigenealogy* reiterates for us what is at stake: not just the multiplication of genealogies and inheritances to stand alongside the hegemonic one, but a

⁵ "Postcolonialism," as I use the term (following Spivak), refers not to a hoped-for or aspirational state of affairs after colonialism, but rather quite the opposite: a hermeneutic of suspicion that focuses on how even the critique of Eurocentrism can serve to conceal and thus reinforce the ongoing violent aftershocks of colonisation.

⁶ Or, perhaps more condescendingly, non-European reflections are categorised as "contextual theology," where this is ipso facto distinct from "systematic theology."

theoretically robust *and* popularly relatable correction to the legacies of colonial Christianity. Perhaps we could explore an inversion of the dominant notion of the family tree, as shared by Denis Koibur with Jione Havea:

According to ancient Papuan wisdom ... future generations are the *roots* of the current generation. This ... overturns the common expectation that the current generation provides the roots and nourishments for future generations. In the native Papuan understanding of the complex and delicate web of life, humans are individuals who are never alone; and unseen bodies are our roots (future generations) and comrades (ancestors).⁷

We should take this not as a simple reversal of genealogy that poses no real challenge to dogmata such as lineal descent, reproductive heteronormativity or the logocentric privileging of written texts as self-evidencing. As Choy discovers in her own ancestral record, “I do not exist because I am female” (183). This poignantly demonstrates how the logic of genealogy, be it biological or spiritual, carries silences as well as traces of the *unseen*.

To reiterate Koibur and Havea with Žižek, this very attention to “unseen bodies” is what offers us the possibility of breaking open such silences and absences in a record of the past that is

not simply “what really happened” but full of cracks, of alternate possibilities – the past is also what failed to happen, what was crushed so that “what really happened” could have happened.⁸

Spivak draws a straight line from such privileging of “what really happens” to colonialism:

This foreclosing of the necessity of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production has ... helped positivist empiricism – the justifying foundation of advanced capitalist neocolonialism – to define its own arena as “concrete experience,” “what actually happens.”⁹

Such analyses resonate with Choy’s diagnosis that, since “thinking historically (‘historicizing’) about the development of Christianity is the reason why Europe is inescapable”(12), the task is not to offer alternative or supplementary histories of Christianity that are located outside Europe, but to rewrite and remediate the dominant account (12-13).

Local reflections

Thus Choy’s theoretical framework equips us to consider some applications closer to home, in the context of the Uniting Church, and in settler-colonial Australia more broadly. In a society whose law, institutions and history operate to systemically conceal, deny and even justify genocide, there is no shortage of unseen bodies,

⁷ Jione Havea, “The Vein/Vain(s) of Theology: Polynesia, Poets, Pigs,” in *Bordered Bodies, Bothered Voices: Native and Migrant Theologies*, ed. Jione Havea, *Intersectionality and Theology Series* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2022), 1–20, 8.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Christian Atheism: How to Be a Real Materialist* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 117.

⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313, 275.

languages and stories which can and do constitute (traces of) counternarratives to colonial triumphalism. Meanwhile, we in the Church should ask ourselves afresh: what are the unintended or at least unattended implications of the Church's continued privileging of a text such as the *Basis of Union*? This is in view of our acknowledgement that it makes no mention of the violent context of settler colonialism, not to mention how an appreciation for the textual genre itself warns strictly against our becoming too attached to the document. When we affirm texts that censure or elide certain bodies, we signal those bodies' symbolic death, and this death is no less real than the biological death that "really happens." If we believe in resurrection and renewal (and not just "newness"), then the urgent task of worshipping communities is to rewrite the stories of dead and unseen bodies – not in a new corpus for optional reading, *but directly into the canon*. The blanks are already there, but sometimes the tradition resists the work of tracing these blanks, because it is *this* work that challenges that status quo.

Moreover, this remedial approach offers the possibility of birthing something truly new, precisely because it has as its reference point "what really happened" *in order to break it open*. This affords the dignity of self-consciousness to one's experience of liberation, because those bodies that have experienced the most brutal symbolic (social) deaths can best claim to have *no interest* in preserving the status quo. It is according to this logic that Fanon declares:

The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions.

I am my own foundation.

And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom.¹⁰

Only by thinking not just a new future but also a "new past"¹¹ can we begin to resist the schema of original-versus-copy that permanently renders the Other "in a state of perpetual lateness" vis-à-vis Europe (71).

Whose betrayal?

At times it might seem as though a claim to the Western Christian inheritance, such as Choy's, serves only to expand the scope of participation in hegemony, without challenging the violent fact of hegemony. This is the catch-22 that postcolonials can face: to enter into real encounter with the dominant culture may be perceived as mimicry or "racial betrayal" (152, 159), but conversely to resist encounter can play into nativism and the romanticisation of subalternity. The false premise of both ends of this deadlock is the pretense that culture – be it dominant, minority, ethnic, spiritual, organisational – is static and unchanging; and this logic renders not just unseen bodies but all of us symbolically dead. Here we can draw upon those strands of the Christian tradition that emphasise the very principle of the radical translatability of what is

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 180.

¹¹ The "greatest creative act is not to be original and break with the past but to reinvent a new past." Žižek, *Christian Atheism*, 116.

essential.¹² To simplify: the history of Christianity is a certain universalisation or pluralisation of a particular tradition – namely Judaism – and furthermore it is even the claim that this plasticity is inherent in Judaism as it is in all traditions and cultures. This principle of radical plasticity is what English Christianity forgot when it imagined itself as Israel *qua* supposedly static centre of the faith (48). It is colonial Christianity, not postcolonials, who must answer to the accusation of betrayal. And it is the most unseen bodies – those whose identity is identity-in-loss, or who are in a “position without identity”¹³ – who bear first witness to this betrayal and its resulting injustices. The “Christianity” that abandoned radical translatability for its own particular account of religious ancestry as “what really happened” is the same Christianity that forced its own culturally specific embodiment to its colonies. It is uniquely the survivors of this violence who can lead the work of healing, redeeming and resurrecting this ancestral record – by rewriting it *from within*.

Wicked Problems

John G. Flett

At the south of ‘The Mall’, the one-kilometre ceremonial road from Trafalgar Square via Admiralty Arch to Buckingham Palace, stands a statue of Captain James Cook. Though his death occurred in 1779 at the age of 50, and the result of him attempting to kidnap Kalani’ōpu’u, the chief of Hawaii, the statue was erected in 1914, a final vain attempt to preserve the mythos of the British empire. The inscription, in part, reads: “Circumnavigator of the globe explorer of/the Pacific Ocean he laid the foundations of/the British empire in Australia and New Zealand/.”

Renie Chow Choy’s work is quite marvellous. It tackles the ‘wicked problem’ (more on this later) of post colonialism through historiography, more precisely, “*history* is the problem...thinking historically (‘historicizing’) about the development of Christianity is the reason why Europe is inescapable” (12). In terms of colonization, Choy is less interested in the question of land or place, but “an *ongoing* legacy of imperialism that continues to perpetuate inequalities today, and that is the colonization of history.” This maintains Europe at the centre of Christian histories, and “the bond of attachment that keeps us tied to Europe” (56). Bonds, attachments, ties, is Choy’s key concern. She feels both a personal affiliation, a “‘reverential love’ and ‘grateful affection’ of the colonized,” (56) for the heritage of England, and an alienation from that same heritage. Her quest is a deeply personal one, including such comments as her “disdain at the sight of my husband’s fried noodle side dish adulterating my Christmas dinner” (188). How might her long family heritage in Hong Kong and the Christian heritage which accompanied the British empire be reconciled? Or, is it possible to discard “the assumptions of linear descent, originary movement, historical development and essential unity, all of which work in continued favour of the colonizer and keep

¹² Acts 2. Translation itself is originary. When the gathered disciples miraculously begin to proclaim God’s deeds of power in numerous languages of the world, we can read this as a promise that the birth of the Church is characterised by (among other things) the very event of intercultural translation as governed by the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. If there is an original text, it is not, say, “the Greek”, much less English; but Christ made flesh – where incarnation, too, is analogous to translation. In other words, the tradition of translation does not aim for the transliteration of hegemonic texts, but instead serves to honour the very principle of Immanuel *qua* radical translatability: that the gospel is as true in any one linguocultural paradigm as it is in another.

¹³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular,” *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (November 2005): 475–86.

the colonized trapped in a state of perpetual lateness,” while retaining “genealogical consciousness, the language of inheritance and ancestral feeling”? (71).

The challenge for Choy is “to make the Eurocentric ‘timeline’ of events in church history join up with the events of my life. If I can measure the worth of historical events not objectively but subjectively...would it be possible for my story no longer to be consigned to perpetual lateness?” The method she chooses for this is “‘intergenerational narrative’ or ‘relational autobiography’” (81). By telling the stories of her ancestors and their relationship with the Christianity of the West, that relationship, passed down by her ancestors, makes it possible to bind together her biological story and her spiritual one. “[T]o fuse into a more coherent whole the memory of my non-Western biological ancestors with my Western religious heritage means to articulate an intergenerational family history which can help me claim a right to the Christian heritage of the West – effectively to write my non-Western family lineage into a Western religious lineage” (83-4). Following this argument, Choy asserts that “[e]thnic minority Catholic and Protestant Christians are the invisible successors to the heritage of Western Christianity,” and through “‘ancestor salience’ the ethnic and religious no longer represent distinct circles of memory” (187).

Colonization is a “wicked problem.” Coined in 1967 by C. West Churchman, the phrase refers to a particular type of “problem” which is: *interconnected*: not restricted to political or economic concerns, but threaded through society, culture, and the environment, meaning that one cannot address one aspect of the problem without addressing the others; *includes a complex stakeholder landscape*: there are multiple actors, including former colonial powers, indigenous communities, international organizations, settler peoples, all with conflicting investments and perspectives; *without a clear solution*: any proposed solution is not right or wrong, but better or worse because the problem is not itself understood until the formulation of a solution, and due to the complex independencies, the attempt to solve a wicked problem may both reveal and create further problems; and, *how the problem is described determines its form of resolution*.¹⁴ It is both necessary and fateful to address wicked problems.

I learnt a great deal from Choy’s work. I had not recognised the theo-political use of genealogy, though it seems completely obvious in retrospect. I am a big fan of cartography in relation to theological discourse, and very grateful to have encountered “tidalectics”! Colonization is a wicked problem. My reading of Choy’s “solution” concerns whether it is, not true or false, but better or worse for the realities of post-coloniality in the “colonies.”

“Rule, Britannia! rule the waves: Britons never will be slaves” (James Thomson, 1740).

James Cook appears nowhere in Choy’s text, nor do any Indigenous voices. This person (and what he represents) and these voices ground my own interconnected and complex stakeholder part of the wicked problem, and needs to be remembered in the conversation for settler-colonisers who read the work. While her accounts of the intertwining of historical locations and cultural artefacts in England are wistful, romantic, her formal learned discussion of coloniality and the ongoing realities of Imperialism is bloodless.

¹⁴ Horst W. J. Rittel, and Melvin M. Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 2 (1973): 155–69.

Cook inspired the missionary imagination of William Carey, including his account of the Māori in Aotearoa. Carey affirmed with gusto the “great brutality and eagerness” with which “cannibals feed upon the flesh of their slain enemies,” the truth of which was “ascertained, beyond a doubt, by the late eminent navigator, Cooke, of the New Zealanders... Human sacrifices are also very frequently offered so that scarce a week elapses without instances of this kind. They are in general poor, barbarous, naked pagans, as destitute of civilization, as they are of true religion.”¹⁵ When I stand under the statue of Cook, read the insipid inscription, I too feel disdain. His gaze is directed up apparently towards that not yet seen, as of course befits a great explorer who discovered ‘nothing’ (*terra nullius*). In reality, his gaze follows its inscription, staring towards the seat of empire, the ongoing generational beneficiary of sanctioned and excited theft and murder, towards Buckingham Palace. I feel disdain for the bleached version of history, the imaginary, the mythos, it represents. As people pass by me going about their day, I feel shame for the loss of Indigenous lives, cultures, languages, ancestors, and memories. Britons might never be slaves, but they love(d) enslavement. In this, they not simply wrote history, but destroyed histories – histories past and histories future.

Choy is correct: history is a central issue. To de-territorialise Christianity (to de-identify Christianity and Europe) demands its de-historicization. She is also correct that the writing and reception of Christian history is soaked through with imperial imagination. But Choy also inserts a sense of inevitability into the discourse: via colonization, the British did bring Christianity to the global South. She rejects the idea of a lineal history – except on this one point.

Indigenous histories and storytelling are absent from the history Choy deploys. Her “solution” constructs a “problem” which is itself located in England as the point of “homage” and “belonging.” She observes the absence of voices of those migrants who visit sites of history, but omits the multitude of non-Britons who translated, guided, navigated, nourished, resupplied the ships as they journeyed. There is nothing about people groups who understand the arrival of the Britons as something their ancestors lead them to – it was the ancestors who called, not the British who came. Then we have a question of the nature of time itself. In 1993, Kosuke Koyama too observed how Christians justify imperialism using a “linear image of history”: “the image of straight line, the image of efficiency, and that of the Biblical *hesed*, steadfast love, cannot go together. It is the *hesed* that wakens people to the truth about history.” While Choy may object that this represents a theological approach that avoids what she construes as the “historical” (57), Koyama permits all peoples to give their account of history via all images, “be it a straight line or circle or triangle or pendulum or zigzag or a point.”¹⁶ Time is construed differently in different places and these differences belong also to the construction of history – and to its relativisation.

Three examples may suffice. I offer them to Choy as someone with a different form of fragmented memory, a different location within the colonial reality. First, while Choy differentiates the colonization of land (place) from the colonization of time (56), for many peoples the very possibility of this differentiation constitutes the problem.¹⁷ Second, Choy introduces Israel Kamudzandu’s argument that Paul’s rereading

¹⁵ William Carey, *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens, in Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, Are Considered* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1961 [1972]), 63.

¹⁶ Kosuke Koyama, “New World – New Creation: Mission in Power and Faith,” *Mission Studies* 10, no. 1-2 (1993): 73-4.

¹⁷ As but one example, see Ilaitia Sevatia Tuware, “Emerging Themes for a Pacific Theology,” *Pacific Journal of Theology, Series 2* 7 (1992): 49-55.

of Abraham as the spiritual ancestor of all peoples liberates Christians from all other heritages to introduce their own spiritual ancestors. Her response to this proposal is as decisive as it is dismissive: it is “not only *not* postcolonial but fundamentally colonial” (58). Choy’s response is due to what she sees as a supersessionist logic underlying Kamudzandu’s argument. Citing William Jennings, a “supersessionist reading ‘[jettisons] Israel from its calculus of the formation of Christian life’, replacing Israel with the Church; in so doing it positions Christian identity fully outside the identities of Jews and makes its own election and inclusion the primary matter” (58). But is Kamudzandu replacing Israel with the Church, or is he denying the primacy given to a certain embodied history, that is, the identification of the body of Christ and the Church with western history – and so the destruction of his own history in becoming Christian?¹⁸ Third, as stated above, I learnt a great deal from Choy’s critical account of genealogy, and yet Whakapapa (genealogy) remains basic to the life systems of Indigenous peoples, with the Māori as one example. Indeed, basic to the process of “cultural colonization” was the textualization by westerners of these Whakapapa and so their reduction to superstition – a process of infantilising their histories and so their destruction.¹⁹ Choy’s text is short, innovative, and personal, but for me the solution construed the problem, or, the personal truncated the histories and attendant voices.

I write as an Anglo settler, a person whose family moved from Scotland to Aotearoa in the post-war period. In terms of the complex interconnectivity of the wicked problem of colonization, where does the Anglo-settler stand? According to Choy’s stated problem, the biological and the spiritual histories are already one in me. I am a manifestation of the ongoing colonial reality. The land on which I theologise, on which I worship, is stolen and in a most murderous fashion. Yet, the ‘antipodeans’ only appear on the English radar when they need something. Choy’s own account of settler-colonialism amounts to the observation that “[s]ettler immigrants in the Anglosphere (the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) often wish to discover their ties to the UK” (79). No. Whatever ‘bond of attachment’ might still exist for us settler immigrants needs to be irrevocably destroyed. The fragmentation of histories experienced by settlers needs to be resolved by investing interest in local histories, the telling of local stories. This necessarily must privilege Indigenous stories, and, more than this, their own ways of constructing history and time, and so place. While reading Choy’s proposal of an intergenerational narrative, I imagined treating Māori culture, language, and history as my spiritual history, and interweaving it with my biological history by which I might become an invisible successor to that heritage. It is a preposterous proposal due precisely to the generational biological history itself – the ongoing realities of colonisation (Indigenous land dispossession, systemic racism, cultural erosion, economic and health disparities). Colonisation is a wicked, wicked problem.

¹⁸ See here the work of Choan-Seng Song, “From Israel to Asia: A Theological Leap,” *Ecumenical Review* 28, no. 3 (1976), 252-65; and, Steve Charleston, “The Old Testament of Native America,” in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies From the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, and Mary Potter Engel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 69-81.

¹⁹ Nēpia Mahuika, “A Brief History of Whakapapa: Māori Approaches to Genealogy,” *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019), 32, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020032>.

The Author's Response

Renie Chow Choy

Perhaps a good indication of a worthwhile project is that no sooner have you begun to reflect on it than it is already leading you elsewhere, opening up new avenues for exploration through the generous engagement of those who have found something useful in the work. For me, the publication of this book led to invitations to join a number of Church of England committees responsible for the conservation and interpretation of historic church buildings and cathedrals, and to appointments working with historic collections at St Paul's Cathedral and now as Public Historian at Westminster Abbey. These roles, relatively recent in my professional life, satisfy a passion for public history and the heritage sector I did not know I had until writing this book. Perhaps to my surprise, my interest in questions of heritage from a postcolonial lens has, by and large, been welcomed within the Church of England. The day I was handed my key to Westminster Abbey, a friend said to me, "you're an insider now – institutional access is important." But what is this "insider" status really good for? The three profound, productive, and deeply generous engagements with my book presented in this book forum not only moved me through their personal sharing and honest critiques, but highlighted for me that these questions are pressing globally – far beyond just a small group of Anglicans from diasporic communities living in the UK. While writing, I worried that my experience was too unique, my questions too eccentric. But since its publication, the many people who have shared how the book has resonated with them have underscored one of the stranger ironies of colonial legacies: that what once divided and dominated now gives rise to new solidarities, and diasporas and homeland communities are entangled in ways we still scarcely comprehend. So, this is not a matter of me working on questions about the Christian West's cultural heritage from the "inside," while you, in the Uniting Church in Australia, do so from the margins, "down under." Instead, what our shared labour reveals is that centre and margin are no longer geographically – or even institutionally – fixed: the real work is happening wherever people are willing to confront the contradictions of their inheritance, wherever they are rearranging the meanings of faith, memory, and belonging to serve future generations.

Sunny Chen's recounting of his childhood dismissal of his glorious genealogical ancestry as "irrelevant," and the instinctive coping mechanism of compartmentalisation of which this is just one example, carried a heartbreaking poignancy. What use was this inheritance, after all, in the context of Western Christianity? Chen finds hope in the idea of "cultural rearrangement" which I had discussed in the book citing Liu Xiaofeng. For Liu, the encounter between Chinese culture and Western Christianity cannot be reduced to negotiation; it must be an existential transformation of both cultures, a fundamental reordering of meaning. Applying this to multicultural communities within the Uniting Church, communities shaped by dominant Anglo traditions, Chen suggests that categories like dialogue, inculturation, or assimilation are less useful than the possibility of full-scale "cultural rearrangement." These days, I'm preoccupied with what this actually looks like – literally – in cultural institutions, where the "rearrangement of culture" refers to concrete acts like shifting interpretation panels or inserting new ones to rebalance the dominant discourse, to engage in a literal reconfiguring of curatorial space. Readers of this journal will know more than I about the strides made in Australia's museum sector, where rearranging culture means honestly tracing the provenance of heritage objects associated with Indigenous Peoples, recovering their original functions, restoring relationships with originating communities, and returning to them the authority to define what their heritage means today. This curatorial 'cultural rearrangement' is more than metaphor:

it affirms the general direction being pursued by other disciplines moving toward public interpretation, including public theology. These are practices that resist compartmentalisation by ethnicity, education, race, gender, sexuality, etc., and instead insist on their relevance to the conservation and interpretation of heritage assets. The challenge is how to apply the literal model of ‘cultural rearrangement’ in broader disciplines more generally. The cultural rearrangement of museum objects might mean restitution or recontextualization, but that of theology – of making Chen’s “glorious ancestral history” meaningful and generative in the encounter with Western Christianity – demands the far more abstract task of reshaping conceptual categories.

Joy Han’s response presents a profound challenge to historians. The cliché “learning from history” is frequently invoked in the UK to justify ongoing investment in addressing contested heritage. But Han seems to suggest that, for marginalised communities, there is a deeper dignity in refusing to be defined by historical contingency and historical inevitability. Drawing inspiration from Fanon and from Papuan wisdom, she suggests that our true “roots” lie not in the past, but in the unborn future, so that we reach backwards from a vision of what we long to be, in order to re-narrate what has already been. This is a revolutionary idea, and one that I find deeply inspiring as I turn my mind, once again, to my current professional preoccupations in the cultural sector. Historic conservation assumes a duty to protect the past: it is patrimony, stewardship, custodianship, guardianship, and so it is, by its very nature, conservative. And yet, the sector is relentlessly future-oriented: who are we preserving heritage assets for, what are we preserving and why? Han has reframed this task as reimagining the past through the lens of the future we hope to create, and allowing that to influence what we preserve and how we describe its purpose. When I began writing *Ancestral Feeling* in 2020, public reckoning with offensive statues to traders in enslaved peoples (such as of Edward Colston in the UK) had not happened yet. My book says nothing about statues or memorials – such a glaring omission in hindsight. Only after the book’s publication did I realise how many memorial objects embody, in the form of marble and bronze, the theoretical dilemmas with which I wrestled. At the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, there was anxiety within the Church of England about an unmanageable volume of calls for the removal of church sculpture and memorials. But the flood never came: apart from a small number of high-profile cases, nearly all church memorials to colonisers, imperialists, officers, and governors engaged in violent campaigns remain *in situ*. Most people today – including those with whom I worked to interpret memorials linked to colonial campaigns at St Paul’s Cathedral – recognise their value for public education and critical reflection. Yet the heritage significance of such objects continues to be defined almost exclusively in aesthetic terms by statutory conservation frameworks within the Church of England. What Han highlights is the agency of future generations: we should not pre-emptively foreclose what they may yet make of difficult histories. It may be counter-intuitive to define the heritage value of sensitive objects in terms of a future generation’s capacity to navigate the complexities of the past – but withholding that opportunity may be its own form of erasure.

John G. Flett observes that James Cook, Indigenous voices, and settler violence are entirely absent from my book – and indeed, to my great shame, this is an omission I’ve only come to grasp gradually over the years since its publication. That I could have written such a book without reference to settler violence in the so-called ‘white Dominions’ despite having lived for so many years in Canada reveals just how ‘optional’ these foundational violences remain for historians of Western Christianity. Ignorance persists, just like the days when one could stir tea and add sugar without thinking about where it came from. Here in the

UK, Anglicans are still largely unaware of the ways in which the church in Oceania has sought to redress harms done to Indigenous Peoples. For myself, it was only when Aotearoa New Zealand theologian, Dr Steve Taylor, reached out to discuss my book, that he was able to explain that what I was calling “the Anglican Church of New Zealand” is now in fact a three-Tikanga model which recognises the equal partnership of Tikanga Māori, Tikanga Pasifika, and Tikanga Pākehā. Since the book’s publication, I have realised how narrow my definition of “colonial” was, both chronologically and geographically: how is it possible, only five years ago, for my account of England’s cultural-religious heritage to have been, as Flett describes, so “wistful” and “romantic” – and so “bloodless”? And yet, before this fact has even had the chance to sink in, there is already a new intellectual challenge being made, even (or especially) from theological circles, that Empire has been a constant in human civilization and bloodshed is par for the course. This view argues that the British Empire was not uniquely or especially evil, and so is undeserving of the intense critique and disproportionate scrutiny which it receives today. The “woke mob,” critics allege, overstates settler violence and the ills of enslavement relative to what other historical empires did. While Flett might state that “Britons might never be slaves, but they love(d) enslavement,” yet some voices in the UK would argue conversely that Britons hated enslavement so much that they spent more time, more money, more manpower, and more naval power in ending slavery than profiting from it. Moreover, it was from the British Empire, and the ideas shaped by Western Christianity, that many of the liberal values we now cherish – such as the rule of law, human rights, and humanism – first gained global traction. Therefore critics argue that the “disproportionate” scrutiny on the ills of British Empire risks eroding these very values. Moreover, it seems to have become increasingly acceptable to suggest that it is the “native” white population in Europe and the Anglosphere that is being displaced now by migrants, both demographically and culturally. In this environment, Flett’s profound, radical, and moving call will be a hard sell:

Choy’s own account of settler-colonialism amounts to the observation that “[s]ettler immigrants in the Anglosphere (the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) often wish to discover their ties to the UK” (79). No. Whatever “bond of attachment” might still exist for us settler immigrants needs to be irrevocably destroyed.

But if you are the Dean of a cathedral or historic abbey reliant on admission fees from tourists, mainly of the middle-aged white demographic from the US, Canada, and Australia, to keep your doors open, what incentive is there to undo the “bond of attachment”? The settler colonialism which (to use a much-loved euphemism) underpins the “special relationship” between these nations and Britain is as good for tourism as it is good for trade deals: “irrevocably destroying” these bonds of attachment is not going to keep the ecclesiastical sites open (or the trade tariffs down). Under such conditions, the power of Flett’s argument lies in its uncompromising demand that white settler audiences relinquish their role as sole arbiters of these bonds; the urgent task is to expose how those ties are far more violent, painful, and complex than the naïve notion of “attachment” I had employed.

I’ve selfishly linked my responses to all three pieces back to the cultural heritage sector, because this is where history and theology are experienced and consumed by the public – and where, I am discovering, the practical difficulties of implementing the worthy and important ideas proposed by Chen, Han, and Flett are most acute. Colonisation – and any attempt to reckon with it – is, as Flett says, a wicked, wicked problem: “damned if you do, damned if you don’t,” a colleague once said to me with a helpless sigh. I don’t know what

our shared labour will produce in heritage spaces still largely defined by traditional dominant voices and the realities of money and tourism – Chen's faith in the cultural rearrangement of theology, Han's faith in the radical translatability of Christianity, Flett's faith in the privileging of Indigenous concepts of history, time, and place, not to mention the countless efforts across churches worldwide to include more voices, integrate more memories, diversify histories, de-linearise temporalities, and de-territorialise mentalities. But if there is a coherent goal we share across continents and contexts, perhaps it is this: to keep remaking the interpretive ground itself – the terms, categories, and commitments through which meaning is made – so that what was once marginal, belated, or optional is not included out of moral obligation or sense of duty, but because it is recognised as foundational. To cite another part of Kosuke Koyama's article quoted by Flett, though we may assume mission is about making outsiders insiders, in fact it is the outsiders who are at the center of the gospel itself: "The reason for this is that Christ the outsider is the new center."²⁰

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²⁰ Kosuke Koyama, "New World – New Creation: Mission in Power and Faith," *Mission Studies* 10, no. 1-2 (1993): 75.



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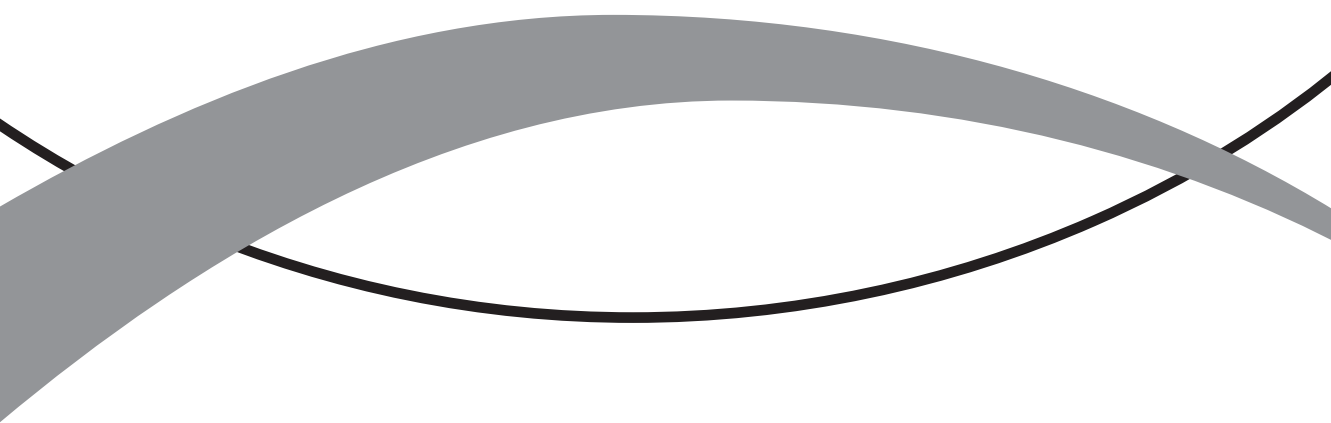
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