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Session name: Heritage Ecologies and Environmental Justice: Power, Care, and Climate Futures

Session proposer: Dr Roslynn Ang and Dr Yunci Cai

Discussant: Dr Magdalena Buchczyk

Abstract

This panel examines heritage as a critical site through which struggles for environmental justice are articulated, contested, and enacted in the context of climate change. Drawing on anthropology, critical heritage studies, environmental humanities, and geography, it explores how heritage is embedded within unequal socio-ecological relations shaped by colonial histories, extractive economies, and uneven environmental governance.

Challenging dominant heritage frameworks that prioritise safeguarding and management, the panel foregrounds heritage ecologies: relational assemblages of people, land, water, non-human beings, and practices. From this perspective, heritage is not a passive cultural resource but an active mode of environmental knowledge, responsibility, and resistance. The panel asks what understandings of heritage emerge when environmental justice, rather than preservation alone, is placed at the centre of heritage theory and practice.

Key questions include: How do conservation and climate adaptation policies affect the transmission of ICH, particularly for Indigenous and marginalised communities? In what ways are heritage practices mobilised to assert environmental rights, land and water sovereignty, and climate justice claims? How do heritage regimes reproduce or challenge environmental inequities, exclusions, and forms of slow violence? And how might reconceptualising ICH as a relational, justice-oriented practice disrupt technocratic and extractive models of environmental protection?

Through comparative case studies and critical interventions, the panel highlights how heritage practices articulate alternative ethics of care, responsibility, and intergenerational justice across human and more-than-human worlds. In doing so, it positions heritage as a vital arena for rethinking environmental governance and for imagining more just and sustainable climate futures grounded in lived relationships between people and place.

<u>Presenter 1</u>

Name: Yunci Cai

Organisation: University of Leicester

Position: Associate Professor in Museum and Heritage Studies

Primary email: yc277@leicester.ac.uk

Biography (max 50 words):

Yunci Cai is Associate Professor in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of Leicester, UK. She has research interests in the cultural politics and museologies in and of Asia. She is the author of *Staging Indigenous Heritage* (Routledge 2020) and the editor of *The Museum in Asia* (Routledge 2025).

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

Heritage as Resistance: Indigenous Environmental Justice and Cultural Mobilisation in Johor Bahru, Peninsular Malaysia

This paper explores how the Orang Seletar community of Kampung Sungai Temon in Johor Bahru, Peninsular Malaysia mobilises cultural heritage to resist environmental and social injustices. Decades of neoliberal development, including large-scale coastal reclamation for the Danga Bay project, have polluted waters, destroyed fishing grounds, and encroached on their customary territories, exacerbating climate vulnerabilities and processes of Indigenous dispossession. Using settler colonialism as a lens and long-term ethnographic research, the paper examines how heritage, embodied in environmental knowledge, practices, and relational ties to land and sea, is strategically deployed to contest exclusion, assert environmental rights, and protect cultural continuity. It highlights the complex, often ambivalent role of heritage: both a site of resistance and a terrain shaped by pressures from development, assimilation, and ecological transformation. The study contributes to debates on heritage, environmental justice, and Indigenous struggles in resource frontier contexts.

Presenter 2

Name: Roslynn Ang

Organisation: Independent Scholar

Position: N.A.

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Biography (max 50 words):

Dr. Roslynn Ang is an educator and scholar in a long-term engagement with the Sapporo Upopo Hozonkai, an intangible cultural heritage performance group dedicated to revitalizing Indigenous Ainu song and dance in Japan. Her research interests include performance and media, decolonizing methodology, indigeneity, representations of race and nation, and Japan's global colonial history.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

Sacred Gifts, Sovereign Waters: The Raporo Ainu Lawsuit and the Politics of Survivance

The Indigenous Ainu of Northern Japan have faced the systematic dismantling of ancestral resource rights through enduring settler colonial policies. This paper examines the Raporo Ainu Nation's legal struggle to reclaim salmon-fishing rights in the Tokachi River. Far from a property dispute, this litigation asserts that salmon are *Kamuy-cep*, sacred gifts mandating kinship over commodification. By leveraging Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), the Nation challenges settler sovereignty, reframing the river as a site of inherent Indigenous jurisdiction and reciprocal responsibility. This research argues that the lawsuit embodies "survivance" by centering an Indigenous ethics of care for non-human relatives within contemporary climate adaptation. By prioritizing reciprocity over extraction, the Ainu provide a transformative critique of settler-colonial logic. This study illuminates how Indigenous-led legal and cultural pathways offer essential frameworks for achieving just and ecologically sustainable futures.

Presenter 3

Name: Yew-Foong Hui

Organisation: Hong Kong Shue Yan University

Position: Professor

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Biography (max 50 words):

Yew-Foong Hui is an anthropologist who has led the heritage documentation of two major Chinese cemeteries in Singapore. Among his research interests are Chinese diasporic heritage, digital heritage, and the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. He is co-editor of *Heritage conservation and China's Belt and Road Initiative* (Routledge, 2023).

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

For Heritage and the Environment: Public Discourse for the Preservation of Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore

As spaces for remembering the dead, cemeteries remake the environment in ways that facilitate commemoration. In valorizing such spaces as heritage, whether in terms of its tangible forms (graves) or intangible forms (rituals), the impact of deathscapes on the environment is often elided. Yet, there are also instances where the value of deathscapes is articulated in environmental terms (e.g. green lung, sanctuary for birds). Through unraveling the discourse of heritage activism associated with Bukit Brown Cemetery, in the context of the Singapore government seeking to remove part of the cemetery to make way for an eight-lane highway, this paper seeks to explicate the complex and uneasy intertwining of Chinese commemoration rituals, deathscapes and the environment.

Presenter 4

Name: Deniz Ilkiz

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Position: Assistant Professor

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Biography (max 50 words):

Deniz Ikiz is an Assistant Professor on Heritage and Climate Change in the Department of the Built Environment at Eindhoven University of Technology. Her research interests lie at the intersection of cultural heritage and climate change, and she adopts an inclusive, just, and values-based approach to climate adaptation and risk management.

Name: Anne Veere Fee Hoogbergen

Organisation: Eindhoven University Of Technology

Position: PhD Candidate

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Biography (max 50 words):

Anne Veere Fee Hoogbergen is a PhD Candidate in Cultural Heritage and Climate Change in the Department of the Built Environment at Eindhoven University of Technology. Her research investigates the intersections of cultural heritage, climate change, and affect, with an ethnographic focus on lived experiences of climate adaptation.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

Weaving Past Injustices into Future Adaptation: Political Ecology, Climate Coloniality, and Justice in Bonaire

This paper examines how colonial heritage landscapes function as relational political ecologies in contemporary climate justice struggles. Using the former slave houses and saltworks on the Dutch Caribbean island of Bonaire as a case study, it explores how heritage mediates relationships among colonial pasts, present climate vulnerability, and future adaptation claims. Drawing on a heritage-as-political-ecology approach, the paper analyses how climate coloniality is reproduced in Dutch climate governance, while heritage sites serve as platforms for ethical accountability and justice-oriented adaptation. The paper contributes to ACHS debates on relationality by foregrounding heritage as an active connector between people, land, history, and climate futures.