dispute over Koguryŏ is who remembers the history of this ancient kingdom and who inherits its culture. In the interest of resolving this controversy, it is important to note the fact that, in spite of the wealth of Chinese history books containing records on Koguryŏ, none of them communicate the perception that Koguryŏ was part of Chinese history. Since the publisher of this book wishes for new momentum in historical studies of Koguryŏ in the English-speaking world, it is to be hoped that historians will be mindful of these fundamentals in their new or continuing research endeavors.


Reviewed by Joshua Wright, Department of Archaeology, University of Aberdeen

The archetypical Daoist immortal is depicted as a chubby bearded man wearing a loose robe, sometimes with a gourd of liquor in his hand and a donkey or water buffalo standing nearby. He rests in a scenic spot, communing, distilling, and considering the life of the mind. And, if the thesis of Pristine Affluence is to be believed, recovering prehistoric patterns of life.

Daoism is a philosophical tradition rooted in the first millennium B.C. in the Central Plains of China. As a religious movement, it was structured and shaped by political support and millenarian movements during the first millennium A.D. Texts from these two periods provide the sources from which Kohn distills the majority of her information on what Daoists did and thought in the past. Since the archaeology of Daoist communities is almost unknown (though see articles in Verellen 1998), we must make do with what Daoists said about themselves in their accounts of ideal societies, rather than look to the material residues of their practices.

The thesis of this book is that the mode of living set forth in Daoist philosophy was drawn from Palaeolithic and Mesolithic ways of life and that their similarities suggest a conscious construction and knowledge of the deep past on the part of Daoist social thinkers (pp. 7, 202, 207). Daoists, it is argued, sought to bring back a time of small, mobile, hunting and gathering communities and return to a state of “pristine affluence” (Sahlins 1972:38) as an alternative to the oppressive and stratified world in which they lived. Pristine Affluence seizes on a moment in American anthropology and society and runs with it. The idea of the original affluent society, first presented by Sahlins in 1966 (Lee and DeVore 1968), drew on the zeitgeist of that decade by depicting hunter-gatherers as living comfortably and simply without the burdens experienced in agricultural societies.

The structure of the book’s argument is to lay out two sets of information next to each other and assert that similarities between interpreted anthropological syntheses on the one hand and historical social models on the other suggest a common social organization in the past. In this case, the two sets of information include narratives of human evolution and archaeological prehistory (chapters 1–3) and Daoist ideas about social structure (chapters 4–10). Kohn’s archaeological chapters draw widely and uncritically from the last half-century of surveys of world archaeology. They cover “The Stone Age” from the earliest Hominins to the Natufian period of the Levant; “Agriculture and Civilization,” the social and biological changes of the Neolithic; and “Early Chinese Cultures,” which repeats the sequence of the previous two chapters from the Palaeolithic to the Early Bronze Age while focusing on riverine East Asia. Though her bibliography is impressively deep and includes a range of popular and academic sources, the flow of concepts and citations are scattershot and the reader is left with no strong idea of what archaeological interpretations or data are important for the argument. Also sorely
lacking from this section is coverage of Mesolithic society or important examples of these societies in East Asia such as the Jomon culture of the Japanese archipelago.

In the Daoism focused chapters, which have such anthropologically enticing titles as “Forms of Community,” “Leadership and Violence,” and “Foodways,” Kohn offers some primary quotes and discusses the analysis of the codes for living produced by Daoist millenarian movements of the first millennium A.D. as they reacted against and engaged with the states in which they lived. However, much like the archaeological data presented, the focus of this presentation does not center on the argument of the book. Instead, a contrast is drawn between the ideal Daoist community and the modern world. The author asserts that today’s troubled world is rooted in the development of agriculture during the Neolithic. A similar thesis was recently developed in Scott’s (2017) critique of the agricultural basis for the structure of early states.

Archaeological data is ultimately material data; in this case, where information of past material life can be gleaned from the text about these early Daoist ideal communities, we do see not a return to the Mesolithic as the book’s thesis contends, but instead to small community-based agriculture much more evocative of the Early Neolithic (pp. 101–106). Farming is a mode of living that Kohn repeatedly presents as a mere steppingstone to hierarchical state level societies that oppress people and the natural world. Kohn explicitly explains that the same Daoist masters who promulgated a return to small-scale farming were enmeshed in imperial politics at the highest level, so they did not return to the forests and mountains themselves. I note this not to be overly picky, but as an example of the way that the book’s arguments are constructed and to point out the author’s lack of critical awareness of her own position throughout much of the book.

If there is little practical similarity between Daoist practices and hunter-gatherer societies, what can be said of the second part of the thesis, that Daoist philosophers knew something of the hunting and gathering past? The question of engagement with the past in the historical and archaeological past has been examined by many scholars in archaeology and other disciplines (Cashman and Cronin 2008; Eltsov 2016; Horky 2009; Schnapp 1996). These scholars are careful with the material records and painstaking in their textual critique. We see none of this diligence in Pristine Affluence. Without presenting an argument, the author contends that Bronze Age and Medieval Daoist authors were aware of the deep past. The crux of this assertion is that because modern hunter-gatherers can be said to have lived in ways that the author sees as similar to her reading of the rules of Medieval Daoist society, Daoist authors must have been aware of the prehistoric affluence that Sahlins posited.

If the information presented in Pristine Affluence does not support its own thesis, what is this book? It is a panegyric to the ideals of a utopian counterculture (p. 65) and a tract calling upon the reader to use present day Daoist principles to escape the ills of modernity or perhaps even those of what archaeologists call complex society. Chapters such as “The Thinking Mind,” “Fundamental Values,” and “The Role and Position of Woman” are concerned mainly with Daoist principles, teachings, and historical religious communities. Millenarian primitivism does not require the past, or even a memory of prehistory, so as archaeologists, we should either be proud that our narratives can contribute to a utopian vision of society or worried that we have taken the bait offered by the book’s subtitle because it seemed to be an interesting study of archaeology and ideas.

Ultimately, we have no way to judge Kohn’s thesis from the information presented in the book itself. Pristine Affluence is an atemporal and wandering discussion, mixing ethnography, archaeology, scripture, and modern readings of past Daoist texts into an unconvincing argument. It does not even provide an evocative Daoist lesson on the conundrums and contrasts that could raise ponderable questions about present, future, or past societies. What it does offer us is an illustration of the difficulties of bridging scholarly disciplines and critically translating archaeological interpretations of material cultures into a world of dimensionless text.
and abstract ideas. As such, *Pristine Affluence* provides a lesson to us all, not in how to escape society, but in how we might work to strengthen the community of academe.

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Although from the perspective of the general public, Sha Po is a well-known holiday destination on Lamma Island, according to the authors of *Piecing Together Sha Po*, it is also a “microcosm” of Hong Kong archaeology (p. 26). Sha Po is more than a miniature version or passive reflection of Hong Kong archaeology: however, it is actually the cornerstone of the discipline, though somehow it remains marginalized and unnoticed against its commercial metropolitan setting. Father Daniel Finn’s surveys and excavations on Lamma Island, including Sha Po, almost 80 years ago marked the debut of Hong Kong archaeology. Few other sites in Hong Kong have been worked so constantly and extensively, and by as many generations of archaeologists oriented toward diverse theoretical and methodological frameworks, as has Sha Po. Yielding abundant remains from successive excavations, especially in the past two decades, the incomparable Sha Po site is significant not only to the academic discipline, but also to the general public as its findings reveal a complete and unique history of Hong Kong.

Regrettably, the fascinating history elaborated in *Piecing Together Sha Po* has not been told previously. This situation resulted from the nature of Hong Kong archaeology. As the authors indicate, reports on Sha Po present a complicated and sometimes confusing mixture of materials and interpretations because the site has been worked throughout the entire history of Hong Kong archaeology. Although Father Daniel Finn received training in archaeology (as happened during the initial stages of archaeology in many regions), archaeology at Sha Po, as well as that of Lamma Island and Hong Kong more broadly, remained a venture of amateurs and enthusiasts until it was handed over to professional