

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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Piecing Together Sha Po: Archaeological Investigations and Landscape Reconstruction. Mick Atha and Kennis Yip. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016. 260 pp., color and black-and-white illustrations, appendices, index. Hardback HKD450, US \$60. ISBN 978-988-8208-98-2.

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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

archaeologists in the 1950s. A team from the Hong Kong Society of Archaeology, headed by Solomon Bard and later William Meacham, excavated Sha Po extensively in the following decades. A more fundamental change in the nature of Sha Po archaeology was brought by the establishment of the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) in 1976. It entailed that cultural heritage sites should be managed under the sponsorship of the government, but at the same time the archaeological surveys and excavations shifted toward commissioned archaeology (termed “contract,” “commercial,” or “salvage” archaeology in other places). The demand for archaeological work to be conducted at Sha Po has greatly increased since the 1970s as a result of village development processes, government infrastructure projects, and environmental impact assessments. However, commissioned archaeology inevitably led to the fragmentation of Sha Po archaeology both in terms of the agendas for the work and the materials collected. Additionally, the general public tends to view the archaeology at Sha Po as insignificant due to the absence of “treasure” or high-quality elite artifacts. Archaeological records and finds are kept in files that are inaccessible to the public. Such a situation raises the question: By what means can the site’s abundant but vernacular and dispersed remains be turned into a relatively holistic account of the past?

The authors of this book have an unusual position in that they carry dual identities, first as professional archaeologists in charge of the 2008–2010 excavation session and second as residents of Lamma Island. In particular, their local residence encourages them as professional archaeologist to treat even scattered and unimportant artifacts as key materials for assembling a coherent and meaningful local history. Yet the question remains: how can archaeological mosaics be composed into an integrated account of the past, particularly Sha Po’s past? To address this technical problem, the authors introduce the landscape concept and the “piecing together” methodology (reflected in the title of the book). The authors imply that the landscape is a matrix, which accommodates archaeological finds of various dates and from various sources. This

matrix is the best vehicle for conveying people’s economic, social, and ideological activities, since they are both facilitated and restrained by the environment and modified through feedback and re-orientation to the environment in due course.

The results of the authors’ exploration of Sha Po’s past through a unique archaeological perspective consists of three major parts. The first part is introductory in nature. It presents fundamental methodological and theoretical issues, introduces the site, and provides a succinct but precise account of the intellectual history of archaeology at Sha Po. The authors place Sha Po within broader analytic spectrums by accurately introducing the concept of “context,” which is used in different senses in this book. The first “context” explored is the specific, concrete, physical environment of the site. The contextual consideration of topography and geographic setting not only allows the authors to evaluate archaeological finds at the human–environment interface, but also install the small village of Sha Po in a larger landscape extending to the coastal zones of the Hong Kong–Pearl River Delta area. Second, the intellectual context is reviewed in chapter 2, titled “How we know about ancient Sha Po.” While paying respect to the path-breaking efforts of their forerunners, the authors remain alert to the “fragmentary and inconsistent nature” of old unpublished reports (p. 27). Finally, the authors arrive at their methodological context and propose using the concept of “social landscape” in chapter 3. Application of this term suggests that the authors view the landscape as a cultural product, modified by different people for different purposes and based on particular interpretations and evaluations of environmental resources. Therefore, the present landscape is perceived as the result of a continuous modification based on shifting calculations concerning the costs and potential gains in subsistence. The earlier landscape can be retrieved by removing later modifications; such reconstructions can go as far back as the earliest instance of habitation. By this means, the authors establish several horizons by which archaeological finds that might seem odd at first glance become understandable within the proposed framework.

In the second part of the book, entitled “Sha Po’s Human Narrative,” the authors present more details of a reconstructed history of Sha Po, covering a span of more than 6000 years. Considering the essence of archaeological materials as segmented, incomplete, and indirect sources, the Sha Po past is reconstructed here as a series of episodes, instead of a single continuous history. Four chapters correspond to four episodes arranged in chronological sequence; each episode coincides with a different subsistence or social strategy based on a specific interpretation of environmental advantage. In every chapter, the authors not only summarize the finds from various excavation sessions, but also intentionally embed the archaeology of Sha Po in the matrix of other excavations on Lamma Island, Hong Kong, and the broader coastal areas. During the first phase or episode known as the Middle Neolithic period, Sha Po was occupied by fisher-hunter-foragers who used red-painted fine pottery, fine-corded cooking wares, and associated stone tools. The data indicate that small mobile groups reached every corner of present-day Hong Kong during this period, but the activities at Sha Po were not very extensive, indicating that it might have been occupied seasonally or temporarily.

The second phase, covered in chapter 5, is the Bronze Age, the highlight of the Sha Po site. Along with the shift from ground-level huts to stilted houses, the emergence of pottery and stone tools are unambiguous features of the Bronze Age. Besides the rarely reported finds of small bronze artifacts such as arrows and fish gear, the most exciting finds are casting moulds and other remains pointing to the existence of a local metallurgy at the back beach of Sha Po.

The following episode (chapter 6) covers a rather long range from the Han (202 B.C. E.–220 C.E.) to Yuan (1271–1368 C.E.) dynasties. Although Sha Po, along with the southern coastal areas, was merged to come under the direct administration of the dominating powers in the Central Plains, its material culture predominately featured regional characteristics. The authors discuss two graves dated to the Southern Dynasties (420–589 C.E.)

at length and propose a hypothesis concerning a kiln-based, salt-lime industry.

The final episode deals with rice-farming communities and their particular economic and social lives during the Ming (1368–1644 C.E.) and Qing (1644–1912 C.E.) dynasties. By discovering and analyzing recycled materials used by villagers to fill in walls or pave yards, the authors reveal a grassroots history with remarkable detail. The layout of the village and the ceramics discovered at Sha Po show that, after suffering under the early Qing dynasty’s coastal evacuation policy, the village was restored, expanded, and re-plotted within the past two centuries. Ceramics with brand names and other modern artifacts confirm that the small village maintained international connections thereafter.

Besides summarizing the rather holistic history of Sha Po at the human–environmental interface, the final part of the book raises a new issue that has geographic and methodological significance beyond the specifics of Sha Po archaeology. Sha Po is not isolated. Instead, it is a rather typical example of sites distributed along the coast. Therefore, the general historical process seen at Sha Po can be verified and enriched by finds from many other coastal sites. Meanwhile, the landscape archaeology approach has wider applications beyond its usage at Sha Po or elsewhere along the coast.

The book is supplemented by two appendices. Appendix I includes 38 entries providing great details, line drawings, and color images of 50 unpublished artifacts, most of which were found within the past two decades. This appendix addresses some of the authors’ concerns about most finds from commissioned archaeology going unnoticed. The second appendix provides glossaries that are very helpful for general readers.

This book contributes to Hong Kong archaeology and similar archaeologies in two ways. First, it provides a reliable case study and practical guidance for community archaeology, a feature that should be highly stimulating for archaeologists who encounter some of the same dilemmas occasioned when archaeological surveys and excavations are conducted in the out-sourcing business mode. Except for the few

“treasures” that invoke a fever of interest amongst the general public, most recovered archaeological materials are kept in a fragmented state, inaccessible and unattended by the public. The real interested party, namely the indigenous community residents and the owners of the intellectual property, are often excluded from the process of archaeology. Although this book starts with authors revealing that they happen to be local residents, the archaeology at Sha Po still reminds us that it is best to revive archaeological finds by acting with the stakeholders in the local community.

Second, although the authors do not label themselves as contextual archaeologists, this book admirably pioneers this direction,

especially for Hong Kong, Chinese, or Southeast Asian archaeology. The holistic and systematic approach pursued by the authors can be taken as at least partly synonymous with a contextual approach. The authors explicitly express contextual considerations by emphasizing the concept of landscape and the interactions between the environment and people’s various activities. However, an integrated contextual archaeology could be more than that. Even though the authors hint at more applications in their brief references to the context of intellectual history and multiple historical resources, it would be understandable if a picky reader anticipated a more fully realized contextual archaeology at the classic site of Sha Po than is revealed here.