

In this respect, one could argue that an unsatisfactory aspect of Houghton's volume is the failure to discuss more fully the criticisms and evident (or not-so-evident) shortcomings of the IPCC work; but that is not the purpose of the book. Taylor's volume more than compensates for this. Indeed, reading the two may leave students puzzled as to whether the authors inhabit the same 'Global Village' (or planet); both have strong ethical beliefs and environmental credentials, yet are worlds apart in their views both as to the cause(s) of recent climate change, and the direction of current (Houghton's continued warming; Taylor's flatlining, with a recent fall) and future climate change (respectively: strong warming; chilling) in the twenty-first century. Time will tell who was more wrong. While Houghton's volume is intended as an undergraduate text and has the weight of the IPCC FAR and the earlier Assessment Reports behind it, Taylor's volume (particularly Part Two) is the more challenging read, for all – irrespective of one's views on the primary causes of recent climate change.

References

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The Palaeolithic settlement of Asia

Robin Dennell, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 548 pp., £55, US\$95 (hardback). ISBN-13: 9780521848664; £29.99, US\$50 (paperback). ISBN-13: 9780521613101

...most accounts of early human prehistory are biased towards evidence from Europe and Africa, with often only brief mention of what is known from Asia. (Dennell, 2009: xix)

A quick glance at the titles of papers presented at the International Paleoanthropology Society meetings over the years indicates that much evidence exists in support of Dennell's observation; that is, the vast majority of the papers focus on the African and European human evolutionary records, while Asia (except maybe Southwest Asia) receives relatively little attention. The argument made by Dennell is that despite the presence of a substantial data set, more often than not, the Asian prehistoric record receives much less attention *vis-à-vis* Africa and Europe. As such, Dennell's synthesis of the Asian Early and Middle Pleistocene Palaeolithic archaeology and palaeoenvironmental records is a major contribution to the field sorely lacking in such a regional summation.

Dennell breaks up his treatise into a review that covers the Early Pleistocene (Chapters 4–6) and Middle Pleistocene (Chapters 8–11) archaeological records, with opening chapters designed to lay the foundation of the text (Chapters 1–2) and a closing chapter to wrap up (Chapter 12). Perhaps the greatest strength of Dennell's synopsis and what will likely be of most interest to readers of *The Holocene* is the palaeoenvironmental reviews found in Chapters 3 and 7. Dennell covers in some detail the development of the Asian palaeoenvironment from the Miocene to the Quaternary and

includes detailed discussion of the effect of the uplift of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau on the regional palaeoenvironment. Many reviews of the Asian palaeoenvironment by Palaeolithic researchers have tended to rely on outdated information. However, Dennell has collected and synthesized a tremendous number of publications that contain primary palaeoenvironmental data derived particularly from loess/palaeosol and marine and carbon isotopes studies. Many of these articles are published in a variety of cutting-edge English-language journals and easily accessible through university libraries.

Besides reviewing most of the major literature currently available for each of the archaeological sites mentioned in the text, Dennell also makes a number of interesting observations based primarily on his reading of the literature and understanding of the data. For example, in Chapter 5, Dennell (p. 144) suggests that 'large-scale sedimentary systems may have proved more challenging to stone-dependent hominins than to other mammals' and that these systems may have influenced early hominin dispersal patterns. Elsewhere, Dennell (p. 258) interestingly writes that '[h]uman evolution in Asia and Africa in the Middle Pleistocene thus proceeded on parallel lines in isolation from each other, and without any probability of contact'. Dennell's observations are good for developing hypotheses that can later be tested.

Another example of a hypothesis that needs further testing is the debate over the nature of the earliest hominin dispersals. It is generally agreed in prehistoric circles that early *Homo erectus* (*sensu lato*) evolved in Africa and dispersed into Asia sometime after two million years ago. Perhaps what Dennell has become best known for in recent years is his hypothesis that early hominins evolved in Central Asia and dispersed back into Africa; an idea he has termed 'Savannahstan'. Dennell's idea thus directly conflicts with what is generally accepted by the broader palaeoanthropology community. Dennell's idea of Savannahstan is presented in detail in Chapter 6 (see also Dennell and Roebroeks, 2005).

The Dennell text will make a nice addition to any upper division undergraduate or graduate student's library, particularly serving as a useful reference for Asian Pliocene–Pleistocene palaeoenvironmental and Palaeolithic archaeology topics. The tables and appendices are useful compilations of most of the relevant data. That being said, if there is one weakness in this text, it is that Dennell may have tried to synthesize too much. Certain regions are covered in far more detail than others (e.g. see discussion of Southwest Asia and India versus China and Southeast Asian Middle Pleistocene records). In addition, the text skips around a bit and appears to be pieced together in places, while many of the figures, being reproduced from already published works, are of generally poor publication quality. It would probably be worthwhile for the reader to track down the original papers just to be able to better evaluate the figures.

In addition to two forthcoming edited volumes from the Springer Press Vertebrate Paleobiology and Paleoanthropology series (Fleagle *et al.*, in press; Norton and Braun, in press), which overlap in content with Dennell's text, the three volumes complement each other nicely. Ideally, Dennell's text could be used as an introductory guide for an upper division undergraduate course in Asian Palaeolithic archaeology, with the Fleagle *et al.* (in press) and Norton and Braun (in press) edited volumes providing more detailed syntheses and many primary data sets.

References

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