

Genetic analysis unravels East Asia's history, highlighting migration of early farmers

Ancient genomics is starting to unravel the history of East Asia. The first [large-scale studies](#) of ancient human genomes from the region suggest that many of its inhabitants descend from two once-distinct populations that began mixing after the development of agriculture some 10,000 years ago.

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During the early Neolithic period, around 10,000 to 6,000 years ago, people from these two geographic regions were genetically distinct, [population geneticist Qiaomei] Fu's team found. But over time, they began mixing: contemporary Chinese trace much of their ancestry to the northern groups, but are also related to the ancient Fujian people to varying degrees (those from southern China tend to be closest). Fu's team doesn't know exactly when the two groups started to interbreed, but it saw signs that the northern genetic signature had begun spreading into southeast China by the time of the late Neolithic 5,000–4,000 years ago.

This suggests that farming in East Asia could have spread through mixing of farmers and hunter-gatherers, says Ling Qin, an archaeologist at Peking University in Beijing. That's different from what ancient-genome studies have found in western Eurasia, where farmers with Middle Eastern ancestry largely replaced hunter-gatherers in [Europe](#).

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