

Genetic differences distinguish closely related northern Chinese, Korean and Japanese populations

Researchers at China's top forensic academy in Beijing say they have found genetic differences between three ethnic groups in East Asia – northern Chinese, Korean and Japanese.

These differences are coded in less than 50 variations across the sequence of the human genome, and the scientists said these genetic codes could be used by police to trace someone's origin as a way to help identify a body.

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Genetic variations among people from different ethnic groups have generally been found to be negligible, although they may look different. And people from northern China, Japan and the Korean peninsula have a close genetic link.

"The genetic relationship between the Han Chinese and Koreans or Japanese is closer than the relationship between the Han and ethnic minorities in China," [forensic scientist Li Caixia] said in the paper.

But after analysing hundreds of samples in their own and other research databases, the scientists found more than 400 possible variations in the genetic codes of people in these three ethnic groups. Eventually those differences were reduced to 49.

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"These tiny differences must not be used for discrimination, nationalism, as biological weapons or for other purposes, to sow more divide or conflict in this region," [an anonymous scientist at the China National Centre for Bioinformation] added.

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