

The Proto-Chinese *Urheimat*

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This paper argues based on genetic evidence that a Proto-Chinese homeland existed in the plains of central China along the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River around the year 8,000 BCE.

Genetic evidence suggests that there are two primary routes for the most recent large-scale migration of *homo sapiens* out of Africa into East Asia. The first is the **Southern Coastal** route, which proposes that migrants crossed the Red Sea into the Arabian peninsula at the *Bab el Mandib* strait, following the southern coastlines of the Arabian peninsula, Persia and India eastward into southeastern Asia before moving northward into China. The second posited route is the **Northern** route, which proposes that migrants left Africa via the Levant, first moving northward into central Eurasia before progressing eastward into China. There is a third, '**Overlap**' or 'pincer' model, that assumes independent migrations into China along both the **Southern Coastal** and **Northern** routes at different but overlapping times (Di and Sanchez-Mazas, 2011).

As a first, earlier component of the **Overlap** model, we may posit that the **Southern Coastal** migration occurred around 68-63K BCE, perhaps turning northward around 58-48K BCE — along what would become known as the Ancient Tea Horse Road — occupying southwestern Sichuan around 38-28K BCE before eventually continuing north around 23-19K BCE, arriving at the upper and middle Yellow River plains around 18-16K BCE. A second, later, component of the **Overlap** model, the **Northern** migration, may be posited to have travelled eastward from western and central Eurasia during the period of post-glacial warming that followed the Last Glacial Maximum between 29-14K BCE, reaching the upper and middle Yellow River plains around 16-13K BCE.

It is argued that the **Northern** and **Southern Coastal** groups met, overlapped and intermingled on the upper and middle Yellow River plains around 14-12K BCE to form the *Di-Qiang* ethnic group (Wang et al., 2014) — the members of which may have been speakers of Proto-Sino-Tibetan (Norman, 1988, p. 17). This group would then have diverged at around 10K BCE, with some members (eventual Tibeto-Burman speakers) moving south and some (eventual Sinitic speakers) moving east. The Tibeto-Burman group would have moved southward around 10K BCE along the western-Sichuan migration corridor to eventually (8-4K BCE) settle in Tibeto-Burman lands. The Sinitic group would have expanded eastward around 10K BCE to occupy the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River plains area, to eventually become speakers of what is now known as Han Chinese.

If the general scenario presented above is plausible, it would allow for the possibility that a language we may term Proto-Chinese was spoken in the central plains of China — along the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River — around the year 8,000 BCE.

REFERENCES

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