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Prehistoric Human Dispersal to the Tibetan Plateau and Adaptation to the High Altitude Environment

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Human history of the Tibetan Plateau and human adaptation to the high altitude environment is hotly debated in the past decade among archaeological, anthropological, genetic, and even past climate change studies. Based on previous studies on the Tibetan Plateau and our own archaeological studies in northeastern Tibetan Plateau (NETP), we propose that human migrated to the Tibetan Plateau from the last Deglacial period to late Holocene mainly from North China via Yellow River valley and its tributary valleys in NETP. This migration is constituted of four stages (Upper Paleolithic, Epi-Paleolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age) when human adapted to the high altitude environment and climate change with different strategies and techniques. Particularly, the prevail of microlithic technology in North China provoked hunter-gatherers' first visit to the NETP in relatively ameliorated last Deglacial period, and the quick development of millet farming and subsequent mixed barley-wheat farming and sheep herding facilitated farmers and herders permanently settled in NETP, even above 3000 masl, during mid- and late Holocene.