



Prehistoric human settling on the Tibetan Plateau

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When and where did human first settle down on the Tibetan Plateau is under hot debate among archaeologist, anthropologists, geneticist and paleo-geographers. Based on systematic archaeological, chronological and archaeo-botanical studies of 53 sites in Northeastern Tibetan Plateau, we propose that agriculture facilitated human permanent settlement on the Tibetan Plateau initially since 5200 years ago below 2500 masl and since 3600 years ago up to around 4000 masl, possibly assisted by domesticated animals (Chen et al. 2015). By studying hand- and footprints in Chusang, Meyer et al. (2016) argue that hunter-gatherers permanently occupied central Tibetan Plateau in early Holocene without the help of agriculture. However, we think the limited hand- and footprints evidence found in Chusang could indicate no more than prehistoric hunter-gatherers presence on the remote central Tibetan Plateau in the early Holocene. In addition, by reviewing all the published archaeological data, 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 the Northeastern Tibetan Plateau (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 the quick development of millet farming and subsequent mixed barley-wheat farming and sheep herding facilitated farmers and herders permanently settled in Tibetan Plateau, even above 3000 masl, during mid- and late Holocene.

References:

- Chen et al., 2015. Agriculture facilitated permanent human occupation of the Tibetan Plateau after 3600 BP. *Science*, 347: 248-250.
- Meyer et al., 2016. Permanent human occupation of the central Tibetan Plateau in early Holocene. *Science*, 355: 64-67.