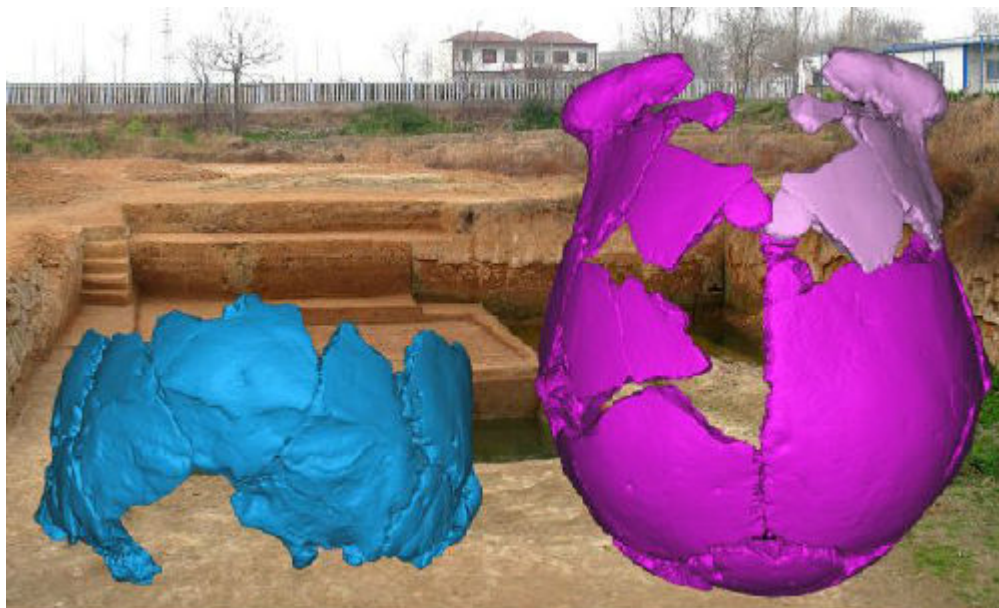


Remains show N. China humans didn't originate in Africa



The 3D images of the restoration of the two Xuchang Man skulls [Photo: Xinhua]

Latest evidence suggests prehistoric hominids in northern China might have been hybrids of the indigenous population and Europeans, challenging the popular view of humankind's African origin.

According to a report published in "Science" magazine on Thursday, human cranial fossil remains dating back to 105,000 – 125,000 years ago found in Xuchang, central China's Henan Province bear characteristics of Chinese hominids, early modern humans and the Neanderthals of Europe who thrived between 30,000 and 130,000 years ago.

The two skulls of Xuchang Man were discovered in 2007 and 2014 respectively by an archaeological team led by Li Zhanyang, first author of the report and a researcher with Henan provincial institute of cultural heritage and archaeology.

Li said the skulls show a similar occipital bone and inner ear labyrinth structure to Neanderthals, and share features of Peking Man (living in Beijing about 200,000 and 700,000 years ago) in a low neurocranial vault, flat neurocranium and short mastoid with inward slopes.

The Xuchang humans lived between Peking Man and early modern humans in north China (about 40,000 years ago), which Li said proves the continuity of human evolution in north China.

Li said Xuchang Man was very likely a direct ancestor of modern northern Chinese, which challenges the hypothesis that northern Chinese were originated from Africans. Geologically Xuchang is located in north China.

In anthropogeny, the study of human origins, African origin is the current general consensus, yet a competing "multiregional view" is also held by many scientists.

It is the first time fossils bearing characteristics of the Neanderthals have been found in East Asia. And it will influence research on the origin of modern humans, said Erik Trinkaus, co-author of the report and a professor with Washington University in St. Louis.

After using CT scanning and 3D technology to make comparisons with other human fossils found in other parts of the world, Li said Xuchang Man is a new species. However, a DNA analysis has yet to be carried out.

Li presumes that the Chinese hominids migrated to warmer European regions during an ice age and crossbred with the local Neanderthals. During the last interglacial stage (74,000 to 128,000 years ago) when the climate got warmer, the ancestors of Xuchang Man came back to north China. The migration might have happened several times due to climate change.