

# China's Dragon man

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**In news-** Researchers from China have claimed to have found an ancient human skull that could belong to an altogether new species of humans.

## **Key updates-**

- The skull was **found in the Songhua river** in north-east **China's Harbin city**.
- The findings have been published in the journal 'The Innovation'.
- It has been noted that the **cranium** (the portion that encloses the brain) **could be over 146,000 years old**.
- The cranium found in China has been dubbed the "Dragon Man" or Homo longi, a name that has been derived from the Long Jiang or Dragon river in the Heilongjiang province of China where the city of Harbin is located.
- The skull was reportedly discovered back in 1933, when a bridge was built over the Songhua river. For thousands of years, the skull remained buried in sediments.
- The UK's Natural History Museum notes that because of the distinctive shape of the skull, which was found almost complete, some members of the team have suggested that it be declared a part of a new species of the genus Homo.
- Significantly, the size of the skull, which has a considerable brain capacity, is comparable to that of modern humans and Neanderthals.
- Modern humans are considered to have very large brains. While sizes can vary between populations and males and females, the average capacity of a human brain is about

1,300 cubic centimetres, and it can weigh anywhere between 1,300-1,400 grams. In comparison, a cat's brain weighs just about 30 grams.

- For one, it brings new knowledge about the evolution of Homo sapiens – which is to say that if the “Dragon Man” is indeed a new species, it might help to bridge the gaps between our ancient ancestors called Homo erectus and us.
- Smithsonian for instance notes that some palaeontologists believe Homo heidelbergensis to be our immediate ancestors. This species was discovered in 1908, and lived about 700,000 to 200,000 years ago in Europe and possibly China and some parts of Africa.
- “Dragon Man” probably lived in a forested floodplain area as part of a small community. Researchers believe H longi may have been well adapted for harsh environments and would have been able to disperse throughout Asia based on the location where the skull was found as well as the large-sized man it points to.
- “This population would have been hunter-gatherers, living off the land. The researchers have said that Homo longi, and not the Neanderthals, were the extinct human species most closely related to our own kind. But a number of experts do not agree that Dragon Man is a separate species.
- Recently researchers working in Israel had claimed that they had identified a previously unknown kind of ancient human called **“Nesher Ramla Homo”** that lived nearly 100,000 years ago.
- They have been told that they coexisted with Homo sapiens, the Neanderthals, and the Denisovans in Asia, Europe and Africa.
- Homo sapiens, the species to which all existing humans belong, evolved in Africa nearly 300,000 years ago as a result of some dramatic climate change events.

- **Neanderthals (Homo neanderthalensis) are believed to be the closest extinct human relatives** and lived about 400,000-40,000 years ago in Europe and southwestern to central Asia.
- These researchers note that this archaic Homo population had mastered the use of technology that until recently was linked only to Homo sapiens or Neanderthals.

Members of the species *Nesher Ramla Homo* could hunt small and large game, they used wood for fuel, cooked and roasted meat, and maintained fires.

These findings are important because they provide evidence that there were cultural interactions between different human lineages.

As per the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, there are over 21 human species. Out of them, **Sahelanthropus tchadensis** is believed to be the oldest member of the human family tree. This species lived about 7-6 million years ago somewhere around present day Chad in Africa. *Orrorin tugenensis* lived about 6.2-5.8 million years ago in Eastern Africa. As per the Smithsonian Museum, this species is the oldest early human on the family tree and members from this species were approximately the size of a chimpanzee.

\* *Homo habilis* lived about 2.4-1.4 million years ago in Eastern and Southern Africa, and is one of the earliest members of the genus *Homo*. Members of this species still retained some of the ape-like features, however.

\* *Homo erectus* lived about 1.89 million-110,000 years ago, in Northern, Eastern, and Southern Africa and Western and East Asia. 'Turkana Boy' is the most complete fossil belonging to this species and is dated to be around 1.6 million years old.

\* *Homo floresiensis* lived around 100,000-50,000 years ago, in Asia. One of the most recently discovered early human species has been nicknamed the "Hobbit". Specimens have so far only

been found on an Indonesian island.

\* *Homo heidelbergensis* lived about 700,000-200,000 years ago in Europe, some parts of Asia and Africa. As per the Smithsonian museum, this was the first early human species to live in colder climates.

\* *Homo neanderthalensis* lived about 400,000-40,000 years ago, and co-existed with *Homo sapiens* for a few thousand years. They lived in Europe and in southwestern and central Asia.

\* *Homo sapiens* evolved about 300,000 years ago, and are found worldwide.