Department of Anthropology

Colloquium Series Spring 2026

Genomic Windows into the Philippines:

Tracing Early Human Migrations, Denisovan Legacies, and Modern Health

Friday, January 23rd, 4-5 PM, Jacobs Science Building 121

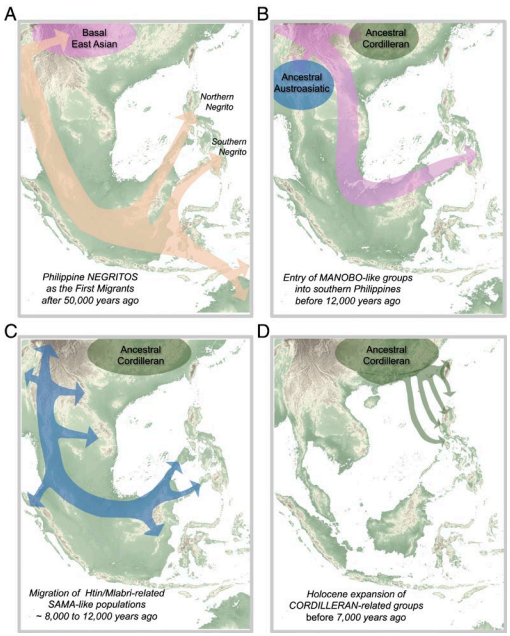

Fig. 3 Model for Philippine demographic history. From Larena et al. 2021 *PNAS* 118 (13) e2026132118

Island Southeast Asia is increasingly recognized as a pivotal region for understanding human evolution, yet the population history of the Philippines is far more intricate than previously assumed. Using extensive genomic data from diverse present-day communities together with new ancient DNA from archaeological sites, we reconstruct a deeply layered sequence of human migrations and interactions that shaped the archipelago. Our findings indicate that the earliest settlers were Negrito groups with deep affinities to the first peoples of Australia and New Guinea, followed by multiple, genetically distinct arrivals ancestral to Manobo, Sama, Papuan, and Cordilleran populations. The Cordilleran lineage appears to have diverged from Indigenous Taiwanese groups well before the spread of agriculture, underscoring that cultural and linguistic transformations in Island Southeast Asia cannot be attributed to a single, uniform expansion. Moreover, some Negrito groups exhibit exceptionally high levels of Denisovan ancestry, suggesting a unique local encounter between Denisovans and early modern humans. Ancient genomes across the islands reveal that early Pacific voyagers share their closest genetic connections with populations in eastern Indonesia—rather than the Philippines—and that interactions between East Asian- and Australasian- related groups varied widely across regions. Together, these findings portray the Philippines as a dynamic crossroads for diverse populations, leaving a lasting imprint on the genetic landscape of the Asia–Pacific region, with implications for modern healthcare.

Dr. Maximilian Larena, Uppsala University, Sweden

Dr. Maximilian Larena is a medical doctor (M.D. Davao Medical Foundation, Philippines) and geneticist (Ph.D. Australian National University) with a research background in immunology and population genetics. Currently a researcher at the Program in Human Evolution in Uppsala University's Department of Organismal Biology, Dr. Larena heads projects on the human demographic history of the Asia-Pacific region, in collaboration with cultural heritage professionals, indigenous communities, archaeologists, and linguists. His research has been supported by the European Commission and the Wallenberg National Program for Data-Driven Life Science in Sweden, among others, and published in various international journals, including *Nature, Science, PNAS*, *Current Biology*, *PLOS One*, *Immunogenetics*, and *Journal of Virology,* among others.

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