In recent years numerous breakthroughs have been made in the study of early human history and the formidable role of agriculture in that story. New insights in several disciplines have cast new light on areas previously believed to lie outside of the reach of science. Taking early crop domestication and agricultural expansions and parallel socio-cultural and linguistic developments such as migration and language diversification among early peoples of Asia as a special focus, we will consider evidence from the study of geography, water, rice domestication, plant genetics, human genetics, language, and identity and social change. We will pay special attention to the conversation between disciplines, to how data and insights can be compared from different disciplines, and how the significance of new insights can be enhanced in the light of the theories and methods in different academic disciplines. The focus is Asian rice, but geographically the course has numerous, worldwide comparative dimensions.

The goal of this symposium is to examine the relationship between the beginnings and spread of rice agriculture and cultural and linguistic developments of early Asian societies. The timing of the symposium is motivated by rapid advances in the fields of language reconstruction and subgrouping, human and plant genetics, archaeobotany, and related subfields of archaeological research. The symposium will focus on the complex relationship between crops, language, and sociocultural developments in early South, Southeast, and East Asia.

Special attention will be paid to the role of rice, as a highly significant, dominant crop in early agricultural transformations and expansions across Asia, and to how human populations were impacted and societies changed as a result of the introduction and development of rice farming. A focal question of the symposium is the relationship between the distribution of major language families and their subgroups in Asia and the spread of rice cultivation, which we also hope to examine in relation to theoretical issues such as the conceptions of “language family” and “population” across disciplines.

Open to all members of the Cornell community and other interested scholars and students. Participation in the symposium is free, but preregistration is required.

Conference website: http://conf.ling.cornell.edu/riceandlanguage/

For more information, email: riceandlanguage@cornell.edu

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Other planned guest lecturers include: James Scott, Yale University (AD White Professor-at-large at Cornell); Laurent Sagart, CRNS, Paris (Visiting Professor in Linguistics at Cornell in 2006-07); Spencer Wells, Director, Genographic Project, National Geographic Society (Frank H.T. Rhodes Class of ’56 Professor at Cornell)