Cloning and Characterization of New Splice Variants of Insulin-Like Growth Factor-1 Gene in Songliao Black Pig

1,2Chang Liu, 1Zhihui Zhaoa, 1Wenlin Bai, 1Boxing Sun, 1Yonghong Zhang and 2Runjun Yang
1College of Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine, Jilin University, Xi An Road 5333, 130062 Changchun, Jilin, P.R. China
2Institute of Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine, Shandong Academy of Agricultural Sciences, 250100 Shandong, China
3College of Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine, Shenyang Agricultural University, 110866 Shenyang, Liaoning, China

Abstract: Insulin-Like Growth Factor 1 (IGF-1) is a single copy gene. It generates several IGF-1 mRNA variants due to alternative splicing. Spliced variants of IGF-1 being some small peptides derived from spliced variants of IGF-1 have critical roles in cell metabolism and growth of various vertebrate species. Porcine IGF-1 gene has two promoters and the existence of Exon 6 has been confirmed in Songliao Black pig in the laboratory. The aims of the present study were to identify new spliced variants of IGF-1 gene including Exon 5 and to investigate their expression profile in different tissues of Songliao Black pig. The cDNAs of two new spliced variants of IGF-1 gene were cloned by RACE. These two variants were named Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb, respectively. The Class I IGF-1-Eb contains an Open Reading Frame (ORF) of 564 bp encoding 187 amino acids (GenBank Accession No. FJ914497). The Class II IGF-1-Eb contains an ORF of 516-bp encoding 171 amino acids (GenBank Accession No. FJ914498). Tissue distributions of mRNAs of Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb were investigated in Songliao Black pig by semi-quantitative RT-PCR. Both of the new mRNA variants were expressed in a variety of tissues. Class I IGF-1-Eb mRNA was more abundant than Class II IGF-1-Eb mRNA in most tissues except for duodenum and longissimus muscle (p<0.05).

Key words: Insulin-Like Growth Factor 1 (IGF-1), alternative splicing, Songliao Black pig, tissues, expression

INTRODUCTION

Insulin-Like Growth Factor-1 (IGF-1) gene is one of the members of the IGFs gene family which plays an important role in mediating the growth and the molecular metabolism (Cote et al., 2007; Dragisic et al., 2006; Krych et al., 2007; O’Callaghan and O’Connor, 2004; Takahashi et al., 2003). The IGF-1 gene of pig was located in the long arm of chromosome 5 (Tang et al., 2002). It consists of at least six exons and five introns spanning a region of >80 kb of genomic DNA. Exons 1 and 2 are alternative leader exons with distinct transcription start sites. They encode part of the signal peptide which are spliced differentially to the common Exon 3 and produce Class I and II IGF-1 mRNA transcripts, respectively (Jackson and Sun, 2001; Yaseen et al., 2001). Exons 3 and 4 are constant. Exon 3 encodes the remaining of the signal peptide and the first part of the B domain of the IGF-1 peptide. Exon 4 encodes the remainder of the B, C, A and D domains as well as the first part of the E domain (Maile et al., 2008). The remainder of E peptide and 3’UTR were encoded by alternative usage of Exons 4-6. The amino acid residues encoded by Exons 4 and 6 in the E domain were named Ea (Ren et al., 2007; Shicura et al., 2006; Yang et al., 2008). The amino acid residues encoded by Exons 4 and 5 in the E domain were named Eb. Multiple forms of pro IGF-1 have been cloned in human (Palsgaard et al., 2009), rat (Chang et al., 2003), sheep (Seata et al., 2010), bovine (Hashemi et al., 2011), pig (Tang et al., 2002), zebra fish (Berishvili et al., 2006), Japanese eel, Nile tilapia and Sparus aurata (Carnevali et al., 2005). All these different forms of IGF-1 are results of the alternative splicing of the region encoding E domain.

Songliao Black pig is one of the major breeds found in Jilin province of China. It has certain characters such

Corresponding Author: Runjun Yang, College of Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine, Jilin University, Xi An Road 5333, 130062 Changchun, Jilin, P.R. China
as high reproduction rate, disease resistance and good meat quality, etc. It is important to accelerate the development and improve the growth of this breed. Researchers earlier cloned Class I and Class II IGF-1 mRNAs which were derived by Exon 1 or 2 alternative spliced to Exon 6. The highest levels of IGF-1 mRNAs were observed in the liver and the two classes of IGF-1 mRNAs were expressed in all tissues examined. In the present study, researchers cloned two new variants of IGF-II cDNAs from the liver by RACE technique and examined their tissue distribution.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ethics statement: Animal experiments were done in strict accordance with the guide for the care and use of laboratory animals by the Jilin University Animal Care and Use Committee (Permit No: SYXX (Ji) 2008-0010/0011). All surgery was performed under sodium pentobarbital anesthesia and all efforts were made to minimize suffering.

All experimental Songlia Black pigs were obtained from Animal Science Branch of Jilin Academy for Agriculture Science. Tissues analyzed including heart, liver, spleen, lung, kidney, stomach, duodenum, ileum, colon, appendix, brach-triceps, longissimus muscle and biceps femoris were dissected and immediately frozen in liquid nitrogen after slaughtered and stored at -80°C.

Cloning of IGF-1 cDNA: Total RNA was isolated from Songlia Black pig liver using TRIzol reagent (Invitrogen, CA, USA) according to the manufacturer’s instructions. RNA concentrations were calculated based on the absorbance at 260 nm. RNA quality was confirmed by denaturing agarose gel electrophoresis.

The 3’-RACE were performed to amplify the 3’-end of Songlia Black pig IGF-1 cDNA using a 3’-Full RACE Core Set Ver., 2.0 kit (TaKaRa, Dalian, China). First, the 3’ end-cDNA was synthesized from 1.0 μg of total RNA from liver using the 3’-RACE adaptor from the kit and the reverse transcript was performed based on the earlier cloned sequence of IGF-1 by Xiao et al. (2009) (GeneBank Accession No: DQ784687). First PCR conditions consisted of denaturing at 94°C for 2 min followed by 25 cycles of 30 sec at 94°C, 15 sec at 58°C and 1 min at 72°C. Second PCR conditions consisted of denaturing at 95°C for 3 min followed by 25 cycles of 30 sec at 94°C, 30 sec at 58°C and 1 min 40 sec at 72°C. The amplification of the target cDNAs was carried out using a hot start and touchdown PCR with a nested PCR. Table 1 show the forward and reverse primer sequences used in the 3’-RACE experiment. Primers were designed using the Oligo Ver., 6.0 Software. Reverse primer, 3’-RACE Outer Primer and 3’-RACE Inner Primer were supplied by the 3’-Full RACE Core Set Ver., 2.0 kit.

The products of the nested PCR were purified using the SUPREC™-O2 kits and cloned into pMD-18T vector according to the manufacturer’s instructions. The sequence of the cDNA insert was determined by sequencing (Shanghai Sangon, China). Sequence analysis was carried out using the blast program (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/).

RT-PCR for IGF-1 Eb mRNA expression: Tissue distribution of Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb mRNAs in Songlia Black pig was investigated by semi-quantitative RT-PCR. Total RNA were extracted from heart, liver, spleen, lung, kidney, stomach, duodenum, ileum, colon, appendix, brach-triceps, longissimus muscle of back and biceps femoris of 6 months old Songlia Black pig using TRIzol Reagent (Invitrogen, CA, USA) according to the manufacturer’s instruction. First-strand cDNAs were reverse-transcribed from total RNA (1 μg) using oligo (dT) 18 primers and Avian Myeloblastosis Virus Reverse Transcriptase (AMVRT, Promega, USA) according to the manufacturer’s instruction.

An amplified fragment of β-actin was used as a standard. For the detection of gene transcripts, 50 μL of reaction mix, 5 μL 10×PCR buffer, 4 μL dNTP Mix (2.5 mmol L⁻¹), 1 μL each primer set (10 μM), 1 μL cDNA template, 0.5 μL Taq DNA Polymerase (5 U μL⁻¹), 37.5 μL sterile distilled water were mixed on ice. PCR conditions were optimized by first checking the linearity (25-40 cycles at different annealing temperatures between 50-60°C). Thermal cycling conditions were as follows: initial activation at 95°C for 3 min, 30 cycles of 94°C for 30 sec, 56-60°C for 30 sec, 72°C for 40 sec and a final extension at 72°C for 10 min. PCR products were loaded into a gel (2% agarose) and stained with ethidium bromide and photographed under ultraviolet rays. The products were quantified by use of a Band Scan. Values for IGF-1 were normalized with the values for β-actin.

| Table 1: Forward and reverse primer sequences used for 3’-RACE |  |
|---|---|---|
| Primers | Sequences | Bases (bp) |
| Forward GSP1 | 5'-TGCGGTGACCCCTTCTTCAATGC-3' | 20 |
| 3’-RACE outer primer | 5'-TAATGCTGCTCCAATGCACTGTT-3' | 23 |
| Forward GSP2 | 5'-ATCGTGGATAGCTGCTTGCTC-3' | 21 |
| 3’-RACE inner primer | 5'-CAGCTGCTCCCTCACTGGAATTCATATAGG-3' | 25 |
According to the mRNA sequences of Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb of Songliao Black pig deposited in GenBank (Accession No. FJ914497 and FJ914498) and β-actin gene (Genbank Accession No. DQ845171), primers for semi-quantitative RT-PCR were designed using the Oligo Ver., 6.0 Software (Table 2).

Statistical analyses: Results were indicated as mean±SEM. Data were analyzed using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The Least Significant Difference test was used to determine significant differences between means. All statistical analyses were done using SPSS 12.0 Software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

IGF-1 mRNA transcripts in Songliao Black pig tissue: The cDNA sequences of two spliced variants of IGF-1 gene in Songliao Black pig including Exon 5 were cloned by RACE-PCR. They were named Class I IGF-1-Eb (Genbank Accession No. FJ914497) and ClassII IGF-1-Eb (Genbank Accession No. FJ914498). The Class I IGF-1-Eb cDNA consisted of 1133 bp containing a 5’UTR of 246 bp an open reading frame of 564 bp and a 3’UTR of 323 bp.

The open reading frame encoded 187 amino acids. The deduced amino acids of Class I IGF-1-Eb included a signal peptide of 48 amino acids, an E domain of 67 amino acids and a mature protein of 70 amino acids containing a B domain (29 aa), C domain (14 aa), A domain (21 aa) and a D domain (8 aa).

The six conserved cysteine residues were found in the domains B and A of the mature peptide (CysB6, CysB18, CysA6, CysA7, CysA11 and CysA20) (Fig. 1a). Whereas the cDNA of Class II IGF-1-Eb was 914 bp in length containing a 5’-UTR of 75 bp, an open reading frame of 516 bp and a 3’-UTR of 323 bp. The open reading frame encoded 171 amino acids containing the signal peptide (32 aa) and the pro-IGF-1 (139 aa). The five structural domains (B, C, A, D and E) and six conserved cysteine residues have the same sequences of the Class II IGF-1-Eb (Fig. 1b).

Comparison of amino acid sequence of Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb between Songliao Black pig and other animals revealed a high sequence identity (Table 3 and 4). The amino acid sequence of Class I IGF-1-Eb has identity of 79.9-93.4% with that of mammals analyzed, identity of 71.1% with that of frog and identity 62.1% with that of fish whereas Class II IGF-1-Eb has identity of 77.3-94% with that of mammals analyzed (Fig. 2).

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The predicted mature peptide of IGF-1-Eb has the following homologies with other IGF-1s: Class I IGF-1-Eb having identity of 100% with chimpanzee, human, panda and dog, 95.7% with rat, 94.3% with mouse and marmoset, 85.7% with frog and 82.9% with fish. Whereas Class II IGF-1-Eb has identity of 100% with chimpanzee, human and panda, 98.6% with rabbit, 95.7% with rat and 94.3% with marmoset.

Domains B and A of Class I and Class II IGF-1-Eb exhibited the highest sequence conservation compared with other animals. On the other hand, the E domain of Class I IGF-1-Eb has identity of 59-88.4% with that of mammals, 58.6% with that of African clawed frog and 43.9% with that of fish whereas the E domain of Class II IGF-1-Eb has identity of 64.4-88.4% with that of mammals (Table 4).

Tissue expression distribution of IGF-1 alternatively spliced transcripts in Songliao Black pig: The tissue distribution and relative transcription levels of Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb were measured by RT-PCR in heart, liver, spleen, lung, kidney, stomach, duodenum, jejunal, ileum, colon, appendix, brachi-triceps, longissimus muscle of back and biceps femoris from 6 months old Songliao Black pig.

The results indicate that both alternatively spliced transcripts were expressed in all tissues examined. The highest and the lowest Class I IGF-1-Eb mRNA levels were observed in the heart and spleen, respectively and relatively high levels in the ileum, brachi-triceps and biceps femoris (Fig. 2a). The highest and the lowest Class II IGF-1-Eb mRNA levels were observed in the biceps femoris and spleen, respectively and relatively high levels in duodenum and longissimus muscle of back as well as, relatively low levels in the liver and spleen (Fig. 2b). In all tissue (except for duodenum and longissimus muscle) the Class I IGF-1-Eb mRNA levels were more abundant than Class II IGF-1-Eb mRNA levels (p<0.05) (Fig. 3).
Table 3: Comparison of the predicted amino acid sequence of Class I IGF-I-Eb between Songliao Black pig and other animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class I Eb/species</th>
<th>Whole protein</th>
<th>Signal peptide</th>
<th>Mature peptide</th>
<th>Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/chimpanzee</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/human</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/panda</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/dog</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/rat</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/mouse</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/hamster</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/frog</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Eb/gal</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pan troglodytes (chimpanzee; GeneBank Accession No. XP_001156459), Homo sapiens (human; GeneBank Accession No. NP_001104755), Callithrix jacobus (marmoset; GeneBank Accession No. XP_002752957), Alligator melanocephalus (panda; GeneBank Accession No. EFBI3444), Mus domesticus (mouse; GeneBank Accession No. EDL21549), Canis familiaris (dog; GeneBank accession no. XP_866946), Rattus norvegicus (rat; GeneBank accession no. AAA41214), Xenopus laevis (frog; GeneBank Accession No. NP_001580865) and Acipenser ruthenus (fish; GeneBank Accession No. ABC54785).

Table 4: Comparisons of the predicted amino acid sequence of Class II IGF-I-Eb between Songliao Black pig and other animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class II Eb/species</th>
<th>Whole protein</th>
<th>Signal peptide</th>
<th>Mature peptide</th>
<th>Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class II Eb/chimpanzee</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Eb/human</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class II Eb/panda</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Eb/rabbit</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>98.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class II Eb/rat</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>96.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class II Eb/hamster</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Eb/frog</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pan troglodytes (chimp; GeneBank Accession No. XP_001156459), Homo sapiens (human; GeneBank Accession No. NP_001104755), Callithrix jacobus (marmoset; GeneBank Accession No. XP_002752957), Alligator melanocephalus (panda; GeneBank Accession No. EFBI3444), Mus domesticus (mouse; GeneBank Accession No. NP_50091), Oreochromis niloticus (nile tilapia; GeneBank Accession No. NP_001075495), Rattus norvegicus (rat; GeneBank Accession No. AAA41214).

Fig. 1: a) Nucleotide and deduced amino acid sequence of Class I preproIGF-I-Eb and b) Class II preproIGF-I-Eb in Songliao Black pig. The signal peptide and the five structural domains (B, C, A, D and E) are indicated below the amino acids with the respective nucleotide ranges in arrows. The six conserved cysteine residues are shaded.
of nucleotide and deduced amino acid while the mature peptides and E domain had the same sequence at both the nucleotide and the deduced amino acid. The most conserved amino acid residues are found in the B and A domains while considerably less conserved is observed in the C and D domains (Imai et al., 2000; Shand et al., 2003). The six conserved cysteine residues were found in the B and A domains of the mature peptide (CysB6, CysB18, CysA6, CysA7, CysA11 and CysA20). These cysteines are conserved in the genome and are involved in the binding with their receptors. IGF-binding proteins were confirmed in mammals (Duval et al., 2002).

Two types of transcriptors with different 5' ends were detected in Songliao Black pig liver, the result of 3'-RACE suggested that different transcription start sites were used in Exon 1 and 2, respectively. In the experiment of 3'-RACE not only the form of 3' end were found with alternative splicing of Exon 3, 4 and 6 but also Exon 3-5 (complete) splicing form in pig liver. And Exon 5 is an alternatively spliced cassette exon of 52 base pairs (bp). Alternative splicing of IGF-1 mRNA results in the synthesis of various types of IGF-1 mRNA in humans, rats and mice (Berishvili et al., 2006). That suggested that maybe there are other splicing form with Exon 5 (only 52 bp) in some tissues and the function of these IGF-1 molecules still need to be studied.

In Songliao Black pig, both Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb mRNAs are expressed in all tissues with varying levels which is consistent with the reported results in other species (Clay et al., 2005; Patruno et al., 2006; Sciara et al., 2008). The highest Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb mRNA levels in Songliao black pig were observed in the heart. However, there are somewhat difference from that of human, rat, sheep, bovine in which IGF-1 mRNAs levels were detected in the liver. The expression patterns of both IGF-1 mRNAs in pig are very similar to the other species in which the expression level of Class I IGF-1-Eb mRNA is higher than that of Class II IGF-1-Eb mRNA in most tissues except for duodenum and longissimus muscle.

**CONCLUSION**

These results indicate that IGF-α gene is transcribed as Class I IGF-1-Eb and Class II IGF-1-Eb in Songliao Black pig and that the two classes of IGF-α mRNAs were expressed in all tissues examined.

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