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Journal of General Virology, 96(8): 2099-2103

2015-08

http://hdl.handle.net/2115/62591

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Isolation of the Thogoto virus from a Haemaphysalis longicornis in Kyoto city, Japan.

Running title: Thogoto virus was first isolated from ticks in Japan.

The Content Category: Animal Viruses-Negative-strand RNA

Kentaro Yoshii12#, Natsumi Okamoto3#, Ryo Nakao4, Robert Klaus Hofstetter3, Tomoko Yabu3, Hiroki Masumoto3, Azusa Someya5, Hiroaki Kariwa1, Akihiko Maeda3

1) Laboratory of Public Health, Graduate School of Veterinary Medicine, Hokkaido University, kita-ku kita-18 nishi-9, Sapporo, Hokkaido 060-0818, Japan
2) Department of Animal Medical Sciences, Faculty of Life Sciences, Kyoto Sangyo University, Motoyama, Kamigamo, kita-ku, Kyoto-City 603-8555, Japan
3) Laboratory of Environmental Hygiene, Department of Animal Medical Sciences, Faculty of Life Sciences, Kyoto Sangyo University, Motoyama, Kamigamo, kita-ku, Kyoto-City 603-8555, Japan
4) Unit of Risk Analysis and Management, Research Center for Zoonosis Control, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Hokkaido 001-0020, Japan
5) Laboratory of Bacteriology, Department of Animal Medical Sciences, Faculty of Life Science, Kyoto Sangyo University, Motoyama, Kamigamo, kita-ku, Kyoto-City 603-8555, Japan

#: both authors equally contributed this work.

Corresponding author: Kentaro Yoshii, PhD., DVM.

Tel/fax: +81-11-706-5213, E-mail: kyoshii@vetmed.hokudai.ac.jp

Word count for Summary: 119, Word count for text: 1486

Number of Tables: 2, Number of Figures: 1
The GenBank[/EMBL/DDBJ] accession number for the PB2, PB1, PA, GP, NP and Matrix sequence of Thogoto virus strain HI-Kamigamo-25 is LC010981, LC010982, LC010983, LC010984, LC010985 and LC010986, respectively.
Ticks transmit viruses responsible for severe emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, some of which have a significant impact on public health. In Japan, little is known about the distribution of tick-borne viruses. In this study, we collected and tested ticks to investigate the distribution of tick-borne arboviruses in Kyoto, Japan, and isolated the first Thogoto virus (THOV) to our knowledge from a *Haemaphysalis longicornis* in the far-eastern Asia. The Japanese isolate was genetically distinct from the cluster of the other isolates from Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Various cell lines derived from mammals and ticks were susceptible to the isolate, but it was not pathogenic in mice. These results advance understanding of the distribution and ecology of THOV.
Ticks transmit viruses responsible for severe emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, some of which have a significant impact on public health. Several tick-borne viruses such as tick-borne encephalitis virus (TBEV), Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever virus, and African swine fever virus, are known to cause severe clinical symptoms in humans and domestic animals, but most cause asymptomatic infection or a non-specific flu-like syndrome. The diversity of tick-borne viruses has been less thoroughly studied than that of mosquito-borne viruses.

The only tick-borne viruses known to be endemic in Japan are TBEV and severe fever with thrombocytopenia syndrome virus (SFTSV) (Kentaro et al., 2013; Takahashi et al., 2014; Takashima et al., 1997; Yoshii et al., 2011); the distribution of others has not been investigated. In this study, we collected and tested ticks to investigate the distribution of tick-borne arboviruses in Kyoto, Japan, and isolated Thogoto virus (THOV), which has not previously been reported in far-eastern Asia.

To investigate the distribution of tick-borne pathogens, 363 host-seeking ticks were captured by sweeping flannel sheets over the vegetation on mountainsides of the northern parts of Kyoto city (N: 35°04’03.29”, E: 135°45’23.13”, Altitude: 140 m) (Table S1). Ticks were collected every week from September, 2013 to August, 2014. Each tick species was determined by its morphological index (Fujita & Takada, 2007; Yamaguti et al., 1971). Individual ticks were disinfected with 70 to 80% ethanol, and washed with PBS three times. Then they were homogenized in Dulbecco’s modified minimum essential medium (DMEM) without antibiotics using pestles. Part of the homogenized suspensions from 50 adult Haemaphysalis (H.) longicornis was individually used for infection of VeroE6 cells to isolate pathogens. Cells inoculated with homogenate from one H. longicornis displayed cytopathic effects (CPE) (data not shown). Inoculation of the supernatant of the CPE showing cells into fresh VeroE6 cells or Baby hamster kidney (BHK)-21 cells also induced CPE, and
clear plaque formation was observed in the BHK cells, indicating involvement of an infectious microbe. Induction of CPE was insensitive to the antibiotic penicillin, suggesting that the infectious agent was Rickettsia or a virus.

To identify the microbe, DNA and RNA extracted from infected cells, was subjected to PCR or RT-PCR for rickettsia, TBEV, or SFTSV, which are known tick-borne pathogens endemic in Japan, but no genomic sequence for any of these pathogens was detected in the Vero cells inoculated with the *H. longicornis* homogenate. Thus, we sought to identify the microbe by next generation sequencing (NGS). Supernatant from the inoculated cells was harvested and centrifuged at 160,000 x g for 2 h, and the pellet was resuspended in PBS followed by RNA extraction using Isogen-LS (Nippon Gene, Tokyo, Japan). Double-stranded complementary DNA (cDNA) was synthesized from total RNA using random primers and the cDNA Synthesis Kit (M-MLV Version; TaKaRa Bio Inc., Shiga, Japan). NGS analysis was performed on a 454 GS Junior platform (Roche) following the manufacturer’s protocol. The resulting reads were *de novo* assembled using the Newbler assembler (Roche) with default settings. Contiguous sequences derived from microorganisms were identified by BLAST search. The average coverage of viral sequences was calculated by mapping raw sequencing reads against target sequences using CLC Genomics Work Bench (CLC Bio, Tokyo, Japan). The pyrosequencing data obtained in this study were deposited in DDBJ with accession no. DRA002619. BLAST analysis identified six contiguous sequences related to the genome of Thogoto virus (THOV) in the family *Orthomyxoviridae*, genus *thogotovirus*. The average coverages for segments 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were x130, x188, x107, x209, x138, and x88, respectively (data not shown).

To investigate which tick species carry THOV at the research area, all tick homogenates were used for RNA extraction using ISOGEN (Nippon Gene, Tokyo, Japan) and were subjected to RT-PCR for segment 6 (Matrix protein) using the forward primer 5’-AGCAGCGCCACCTATTGCT-3’ and reverse primer 5’-TCCCTCTGCAGTCATGTACA-3’.
The THOV genome was detected in both *H. flava* and *H. longicornis*, and their infection rates were 1.92% (2 adult female ticks /104 ticks) and 0.39% (1 adult female tick /259 ticks), respectively.

The sequence of each segment of the newly isolated THOV (designated as Hl-Kamigamo-25) genome was compared with that of other strains available in GeneBank. Nucleotides and amino acids in the complete open reading frame of each segment of HI-Kamigamo-25 showed 72-80% and 79-91% homology, respectively, with those of the Italian strain SiAr126 (Table 1).

A phylogenetic analysis was performed using partial coding sequences of the PB1 (segment 2), PA (segment 3), and glycoprotein (GP: segment 4) genes of THOV strains. Accession numbers of strains used in this study are shown in Table S2. Multiple alignments were generated using ClustalX version 2.1 (Thompson *et al.*, 1997). Phylogenetic trees were generated using MEGA 4 (http://www.megasoftware.net/mega.html) by the maximum-likelihood method with 1000 bootstrap replicates. The Japanese isolate HI-Kamigamo-25 was genetically distinct from the African and European/Middle Eastern isolate clusters (Fig. 1).

To examine the range of Thogotovirus infectivity, several cell lines were infected with the HI-Kamigamo-25 strain (Table 2). The virus in the original *H. longicornis* homogenate was amplified once in VeroE6 cells and then once in BHK cells. Subconfluent cells were grown in 24-well plates and inoculated with THOV at a multiplicity of infection (MOI) of 0.1 plaque-forming units (pfu). Cells were incubated for over 48 h, and susceptibility to THOV was evaluated via induction of CPE or progeny virus production as measured by titration. All infected cell lines produced progeny viruses regardless of species and tissue type. While HI-Kamigamo-25 showed CPE in most mammalian cells used in this study, it did not cause any pathological change in tick-derived ISE6 cells at time points up to two weeks.

European THOV (strain SiAr 126) has been reported to cause lethal infection in adult mice when
given intraperitoneally (LD_{50}: 3 pfu mL^{-1}) (Haller et al., 1995; Pichlmair et al., 2004). To assess the
pathogenicity of the Japanese isolate of THOV, 100, 1,000 or 10,000 pfu of the HI-Kamigamo-25
strain were inoculated intraperitoneally into 8-week-old female BALB/c mice. Animal experiments
were performed in accordance with the Fundamental Guidelines for Proper Conduct of Animal
Experiments and Related Activities in Academic Research Institutions under the jurisdiction of the
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Experimental protocols were
approved by the Animal Care and Use Committee of Hokkaido University. All mice survived without
any symptoms to signs, and high titers of neutralizing antibodies (>1,600) were detected in all
surviving mice. These data indicate that the mice were infected, but that this strain’s pathogenicity is
much lower than that of the European strain in a mouse model.

This survey is the first to identify THOV in far-eastern Asia to our knowledge. THOV belongs to
the family Orthomyxoviridae, genus Thogotovirus, and is a negative-sense, single-stranded RNA
virus with six segments (Staunton et al., 1989). THOV has been isolated in Kenya, West Africa,
Southern Europe, and Iran (Calisher et al., 1987), and has not been reported in other regions. The
Japanese isolate is genetically distinct from other isolates but has high amino acid homology with the
Italian isolate. These results indicate the possibility that THOV circulates widely in the Eurasian
continent.

Little is known about the ecology of THOV. THOV was first isolated from Rhipicephalus species
and Boophilus decoloratus (Karabatsos, 1985), and has been isolated repeatedly from various tick
species (Calisher et al., 1987; Sang et al., 2006). In this study, the Japanese isolates obtained from
Haemaphysalis ticks, the major tick species in the area, indicating that they might be the principal
vectors in the area. THOV is also known to infect domestic animals (cattle and sheep) and a
mongoose (Davies et al., 1984; Ogen-Odoi et al., 1999; Sang et al., 2006). However, the primary
vertebrate hosts in nature are still unclear. The area in which the Japanese strain of THOV was
isolated contains no domestic animals, but wild animal inhabitants include small rodents, deer, boars, bears, and monkeys. Further ecological research is required to elucidate the mode of natural transmission of the Japanese strain of THOV.

Natural infection with THOV has been reported in two human cases, with one fatality (Moore et al., 1975), and infection in sheep is associated with high rates of abortion (Davies et al., 1984). The pathogenicity of Japanese THOV was not clear, but it appears to have no or very low virulence in mice, in contrast to the Italian isolate, which causes lethal infection in mice (Filipe et al., 1986; Haller et al., 1995; Pichlmair et al., 2004). Although pathogenicity in mice is not directly related to that in humans and other animals, identification of the factors (genes) responsible for varying pathogenicity between strains could help elucidate the pathogenic mechanism of THOV and lead to development of prevention and therapeutic strategies for THOV infection.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (24780293, 22780268, 24658261 and 21405035) from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology of Japan, Health Sciences Grants for Research on Emerging and Re-merging Infectious Disease from Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan (H24-Shinkou-ippan-013), and Kyoto Sangyo University (Research Grants E1217).
References


Table 1. Identities of nucleotide (ORF region) and amino acid sequences between THOV Hl-Kamigamo-25 strain and other related viruses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virus-strain</th>
<th>PB2 (Segment 1)</th>
<th>PB1 (Segment 2)</th>
<th>PA (Segment 3)</th>
<th>GP (Segment 4)</th>
<th>NP (Segment 5)</th>
<th>Matrix (Segment 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nt (%)</td>
<td>aa (%)</td>
<td>nt (%)</td>
<td>aa (%)</td>
<td>nt (%)</td>
<td>aa (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THOV-SiAr126</td>
<td>75.13</td>
<td>86.12</td>
<td>77.87</td>
<td>88.61</td>
<td>72.55</td>
<td>79.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jos virus-IBAn-17854</td>
<td>61.63</td>
<td>60.75</td>
<td>68.11</td>
<td>71.77</td>
<td>58.81</td>
<td>53.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhori virus-Dhori/1313/61</td>
<td>53.47</td>
<td>35.34</td>
<td>63.01</td>
<td>61.72</td>
<td>54.61</td>
<td>38.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THOV Hl-Kamigamo-25 strain 78.68 89.45 75.18 90.82
Jos virus-IBAn-17854 62.49 62.2 59.56 49.52
Dhori virus-Dhori/1313/61 55.22 33.06 48.86 20.06
Table 2. Susceptibility of cultured cells to the THOV Hi-Kamigamo-25 strain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cell line</th>
<th>CPE</th>
<th>Progeny virus*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BHK (hamster: kidney)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vero E6 (African green monkey: kidney)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEK293T (human: kidney)</td>
<td>n.d.#</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A549 (human: lung)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA (mouse: neuroblastoma)</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISE6 (Ixodes scapularis: ovary)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Production of progeny viruses were confirmed by the virus titer in the medium above that of input viruses

# Induction of CPE could not be determined due to the short incubation time of the cells.
Figure 1. Phylogenetic analysis of nucleotide sequences for partial coding regions of GP (a), PA (b), and PB1 (c). The percentage of trees in which the associated taxa cluster together is shown next to the branches. Bars, 0.02 nucleotide substitutions per site.
Figure 1

(a) PB1 (Segment 2)

(b) PA (Segment 3)

(c) GP (Segment 4)