A novel third complement component C3 gene of Ciona intestinalis expressed in the endoderm at the early developmental stages

T Hibino¹, M Nonaka²

¹Faculty of Education, Saitama University, 255 Shimo-Okubo, Sakura-ku, Saitama City 338-8570, Japan
²Department of Biological Sciences, Graduate School of Science, The University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan

Abstract

The third complement component (C3) in ascidian was reported to function as an opsonin to enhance phagocytosis and as a chemotactic factor for phagocytes, indicating that ascidian C3 works in mesodermal cavity as a humoral factor like vertebrate C3s. In the basal Eumetazoa, Cnidaria lacking mesodermal tissues, C3 was reported to work in an endodermal cavity. Evolution of structure and function of C3 is still to be clarified. Here we report the identification of the third C3 gene, CiC3-3, in the genome of an ascidian, Ciona intestinalis. Phylogenetic analysis using the entire amino acid sequences of Eumetazoan C3s indicated that CiC3-3 possess a closer relationship to vertebrate C3, C4 and C5 than other ascidian C3s. Although CiC3-3 retained the α-β processing site and 6 cysteine residues in the C3a region, it lacked the intra-molecular thioester bond and the catalytic histidine residue. Instead, CiC3-3 had a unique insertion of about 70 residues long Lys/Arg-rich sequence. CiC3-3 was expressed highly in the embryonic stages, but little in the adult in contradistinction to CiC3-1 and CiC3-2. The expression of CiC3-3 in early embryonic stages was restricted to endoderm similar to cnidarian C3s. Thus, the ascidian complement system could represent a unique evolutionary stage sharing a primitive endodermal function with Cnidaria, and newly developed humoral function with vertebrates.

Key Words: thioester-containing protein (TEP); complement C3; innate immunity; immunogenetics; tunicate; chordate

Introduction

The vertebrate complement system comprises more than 30 proteins present in serum or on cell surface, and plays a pivotal role in innate immunity. This system is triggered by three different activation pathways, the classical, alternative and lectin pathways. These three pathways merge at the proteolytic activation step of the complement component 3 (C3) into C3a and C3b. Upon proteolytic activation, C3 changes its conformation exposing the intra-chain thioester bond at the molecular surface. The exposed thioester bond of C3b reacts with surface molecules of invading microbes and makes a covalent bond, resulting in covalent tagging of microbes with C3b. Covalently attached C3b works as opsonin to induce phagocytosis, and also induces assembly of the terminal components of complement (TCCs: C6~C9) into a membrane-attack complex that can damage the membrane of certain pathogens (Murphy, 2011). The proteins possessing a similar domain structure as vertebrate TCCs are present in ascidian and amphioxus. However, these proteins may not be activated through the complement system of ascidian and amphioxus because they lack an essential domain for interaction with C5b (Nonaka and Kimura 2006). The released smaller C3a fragment is an anaphylatoxin to induce inflammation. The C3 subfamily including C3, C4 and C5 is a member of thioester bond-containing protein (TEP) family, together with the non-complement TEP subfamilies such as the α2-macroglobulin (A2M) and CD109 subfamilies. The C3 subfamily members are distinguished from the A2M and CD109 subfamily members by the presence of the anaphylatoxin (ANA) and C-terminal of C3, C4, C5 (C345C) domains unique to the C3 subfamily (Sekiguchi et al., 2012). Genes orthologous to vertebrate C3 have been identified not only from invertebrate deuterostome such as sea urchin (Al-sharif et al.,...
Fig. 1 Phylogenetic tree of TEP family members constructed by the Neighbor-Joining method using the entire amino acid sequences. Bootstrap values higher than 50% are indicated in the tree. Accession numbers of each entry are; human C3, C4A, C5, A2M, and CD109 (NP_000055, P0C0L4, AAA51925, P01023, and NP_598000), carp C3H1, C4-1, and C5-1 (BAA36619, BAB03284, and BAC23057), ascidian, Halocynthia roretzi C3 (BAA75069), C. intestinalis CiC3-1, CiC3-2, CiA2M-like, and CiCD109-like (NP_001027684, CAC85958, XP_002124325, and NP_001027688), sea urchin C3 and C3-2 (NP_999686 and Spbase: SPU_000997), horseshoe crab C3 (AAQ08323), amphioxus C3 (BAB47146), coral C3 (AAN86548), cnidarian NvC3-1 and -2 (AB450038 and AB450040), and fly TEP1 (NP_523578).

1998; Hibino et al., 2006; Rast et al., 2006) and amphioxus (Huang et al., 2008), but also from protostomes such as horseshoe crab (Zhu et al., 2005; Kawabata et al., 2009) and spider (Sekiguchi et al. 2012) as well as cnidarian coral (Miller et al., 2007) and sea anemone (Kimura et al., 2009). The presence of C3 in Cnidaria indicated that the C3 gene has been established prior to the divergence of cnidarian from bilaterian (Nonaka, 2011). In contrast to its wide distribution, C4 and C5 has only been identified in jawed vertebrate, suggesting that C4 and C5 were derived from a C3-like common ancestor by gene duplication in the early stage of jawed vertebrate evolution (Nonaka and Takahashi, 1992).

A tunicate, Ciona intestinalis (Urochordata) has been an attractive research model for developmental biology for more than a century (Satoh et al., 2003). The recent accumulation of genome-wide sequence information showed that not cephalochordate but urochordate is a sister group of vertebrate, indicating that C. intestinalis is one of the most important species for understanding the origin and evolution of vertebrates (Dehal et al., 2002, Putnam et al., 2008).

The C. intestinalis genome analysis revealed that this animal possesses several genes for complement components: two C3s, three Bf/C2s, 10 of C6/C7/C8/C9/perforin and so on. An ancestor of the two C3-like genes seems to have diverged from a common ancestor of vertebrate C3/C4/C5 and has duplicated into two genes in the Ciona lineage (Azumi et al., 2003a). Using C. intestinalis, in-depth expressed sequence tag and large-scale oligo-DNA microarray analyses have been advanced, which identified gene expression profile during the life cycle (Azumi et al., 2003b; Satou et al., 2002, 2003).

Interestingly, C3s, MASP, factor B (Bf), MBP and two genes of complement C6-like were expressed only in the adult stages. On the other hand, C1q-like and two other genes of complement C6-like were expressed in the middle of the embryonic stages and maintained their expression level during the adult stages (Azumi et al., 2007). The absence of C3 expression during the developmental stages could be explained by one of the following two hypotheses: (1) since C. intestinalis develops directly and metamorphosis in a day after fertilization, protection against infection which is considered to be the most
important physiological function of C3 is unnecessary in this short period, or (2) unidentified C3 is working under the developmental stage.

In this study, we report a novel C. intestinalis C3 gene, CiC3-3, that belonged to a different clade from known ascidian C3 genes in a phylogenetic tree, and that was specifically expressed in endoderm of the embryos.

Materials and Methods

Adults and embryos
Adults of the ascidian C. intestinalis were provided from Misaki Marine Biological Station, the University of Tokyo through National Bio-Resource Project (NBRP) of MEXT, Japan. The adults were surgically dissected to draw eggs and sperm. Fertilized eggs were incubated at devitellination medium containing 0.065 % actinase E (Kaken Co. Ltd.) and 1.3 % sodium thiglycolate in sea water at a pH of approximately 10, to devitellinate chemically (Satou et al., 2001). Devitellinated embryos were reared at 18 °C in agar-coated plastic dish filled with filtered sea water containing 50 µg/ml penicillin and 100 µg/ml streptomycin.

Gene identification in C. intestinalis genome database
Deduced amino acid sequences of all computationally predicted proteins were downloaded from the website, Ensembl C. intestinalis database (http://www.ensembl.org/)(Hubbard et al., 2007), and the Ghost Database: C. intestinalis genomic and cDNA resources (http://ghost.zool.kyoto-u.ac.jp/indexr1.html) (Satou et al., 2005). A typical C3 protein contains multiple domains; A2M_N, A2M_N2, A2M, ANATO, A2M_comp, A2M_recep, C345C, whose profile HMMs were downloaded from the Pfam website (http://pfam.sanger.ac.uk/) (Bateman et al., 2004). HMMER (Eddy et al., 1998) was used to identify Pfam domain profile matches to C. intestinalis protein models. The deduced amino acid sequences of identified protein models were aligned with those of known C. intestinalis C3, CiC3-1 and CiC3-2 and Cio2-macroblubins to find out a novel C3 gene model.

Cloning of a novel C3 gene of C. intestinalis
C. intestinalis cDNA was synthesized from the adult tissues containing gills and blood cells, and used as a template for PCR amplification. To confirm the nucleotide sequences, especially exon-intron boundary, of the novel identified C3 (CiC3-3) gene model, RT-PCR was performed using primers that were designed at the ends of 5' UTR (forward 5'-TTGGAAAGCCGCTACTGCGGACAGC-3') and 3' UTR (reverse 5'-TGCTTTTGCAATATACACGTGGCAGT-3') of the gene model. Probably the nucleotide length of the predicted gene model of 5.7 kbp was too long for RT-PCR, the entire length of CiC3-3 could not be amplified by using these primers. We then designed other primers at the middle of the gene models (forward 5'-TGGAACAATCGCTGCTGCTGA-3', reverse 5'-ATGCCCTTCTGGACACCACATTTCAA-3'), ExTaq DNA polymerase (Takara) was used for this PCR. The cDNA fragments were cloned into pCR2.1-TOPO vector (Invitrogen) and sequenced using vector specific primers or gene specific primers.

Domain Prediction and phylogenetic analysis
Domain structure of the CiC3-3 was predicted by the SMART program (http://smart.embl-heidelberg.de/)(Letunic et al., 2002). The e-value for the domain confidence was assessed by HMMER3 on the SMART program. Multiple alignment of the amino acid sequences among C. intestinalis and human C3s was done by ClustalW on the MEGA5 program (Tamura et al., 2011), as well as by eyes. Based on this alignment, phylogenetic trees were constructed using full-length amino acid sequence information or A2M_comp domain region that was extracted using by the SMART program. The neighbor-joining (NJ) method (Saitou and Nei 1987) using MEGAS excluding gaps by pairwise deletion was performed. The reliability for internal branches was assessed by the 1000 bootstrap replications.

Gene expression analysis using Ciona database and whole mount in situ hybridization
The C. intestinalis protein database (CIPRO 2.5) integrates not only protein database, but also transcriptome database including large-scale EST analysis and DNA microarray data (Endo et al., 2011). We extracted the expression data of the three CiC3 genes from the website and integrated the data in a graph. Whole mount in situ hybridization was performed based on the previously described protocol (Ogasawara et al., 2001; Satou et al., 2001) with some modifications. For antisense or sense ribonucleotide probe for CiC3-3, 544 bp of the 3' end of coding region that covers the full length of the C345C domain and subsequent stop codon for CiC3-3 was cloned into pTAC-2 with DynaExpress TA PCR Cloning Kit, and the probes were subsequently synthesized using Digoxigenin (DIG) RNA labeling mix and T7 or SP6 RNA polymerase (Roche). Embryos were fixed with 4 % paraformaldehyde in 0.1 M MOPS (pH 7.5), 0.5 M NaCl at 4 °C overnight. The developmental stages of fixed embryos were determined following Hotta et al. (2007). The fixed embryos were washed three times with PBST (phosphate-buffered saline containing 0.1 % Tween-20), then partially digested with 2 µg/ml proteinase K in PBST for 20 min at 37 °C. They were washed twice with PBST, subsequently post-fixed with 4 % paraformaldehyde in PBST for 1 h at room temperature (RT), and then washed three times with PBST. After prehybridization at 50 °C for 1 h, the embryos were hybridized at 50 °C for 24 h in the following buffer. The hybridization buffer contained 50 % formamide, 5x Denhardt's solution, 100 µg/ml yeast RNA, 0.1 % Tween-20, and 0.2 µg/ml DIG-labeled RNA probes. After hybridization, the embryos were washed three times with 2xSSC, 50 % formamide, 0.1 % Tween-20 at 50 °C for 15 min, then washed three times with 1xSSC, 50 % formamide, 0.1 % Tween-20 (A) at 50 °C for 15 min. Next they were washed twice with 1:1 (A): PBST at RT for 10 min, and then washed three times with PBST at RT for 3 min. After the series of washing,
the specimens were blocked with 0.5 % blocking reagent (Roche) in PBST at RT for 30 min. They were immersed in 1/2000 Anti-DIG-AP fab fragments (Roche) diluted with PBST at RT for 6 h. The embryos were washed four times with PBST for 10 min and then washed twice with alkaline phosphatase buffer (0.1 M Tris-HCl (pH 9.5), 50 mM MgCl₂, 0.1 M NaCl) for 10 min. For signal detection, the embryos were incubated with NBT/BCIP in the alkaline phosphatase buffer at RT overnight. The stained embryos were dehydrated in a graded series of ethanol, and then cleared in a 1: 2 mixture of benzyl alcohol/benzyl benzoate.

Results

Identification of the third complement C3 gene in C. intestinalis

To find gene candidates encoding multiple domains of typical thioester containing protein (TEP) superfamily from C. intestinalis, all of the deduced amino acid sequences of the Fgenesh gene models and the GENSCAN gene models that computationally predicted from the C. intestinalis genome were searched by local HMMER program using profile HMMs containing the A2M_N, A2M_N2, ANATO, A2M, A2M_comp and C345C domains. Out of five gene models extracted by this analysis, four gene models matched with the already reported TEP genes. The other gene model, Fgenesh76597 or GENSCAN101558, predicted a 3,759 bp open reading frame corresponding to a 1,253 amino acid sequence containing the A2M_N2, ANATO, A2M and C345C domains. The same gene was contained in the recently uploaded KH gene models (ver. 2012) in Ghost Database: C. intestinalis genomic and cDNA resources (http://ghost.zool.kyoto-u.ac.jp/index1.html) (Satou et al., 2005). This gene model, KH.C12.243.v1.A.SL1-1, with a longer nucleotide sequence than that of the Fgenesh/GENSCAN model predicted a 1,873 amino acid sequence containing the additional A2M_N domain at its N-terminus. Based on these gene models, several primers were constructed at the end or at the middle of the sequences, and then a novel C3 gene candidate was cloned and sequenced. The cloned nucleotide sequences had a size of 5,946 bp (1,873 amino acid residues) that matched 98.7 % (5666/5739) to that of the KH gene model. The novel and the third complement C3 gene in C. intestinalis was designated as CiC3-3.

Table 1

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<th>Catalytic Histidine</th>
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Phylogenetic analysis using the Neighbor-joining method

The deduced amino acid sequence of the CiC3-3 gene was aligned with the known Eumetazoan TEP superfamily genes using ClustalW program (data not shown). The phylogenetic tree was constructed based on the entire amino acid sequences using the NJ method (Fig. 1). The phylogenetic tree showed the presence of three subfamilies, the C3, A2M and CD109 subfamilies, supported with bootstrap percentages of 52, 98 and 99 %, respectively. In the C3 subfamily, CiC3-3 was grouped with vertebrate C3/C4/C5 with a 85 % bootstrap percentage, but not with other ascidian C3 lineage including CiC3-1, CiC3-2 and H. roretzi C3. This result together with a long branch length of CiC3-3 indicates that CiC3-3 is a highly derivative ascidian C3, whose evolutionary origin is still to be clarified by analyzing other ascidian species.

Structural features of CiC3-3

To reveal whether CiC3-3 conserves the primary structure as well as domain structures of the vertebrate C3 subfamily, the deduced amino acid sequences of CiC3-3 were aligned with CiC3-1 and -2, and human C3, C4 and C5. The SMART domain search was also performed to find the multiple domains (Fig. 2). The alignment and domain search showed that CiC3-3 possesses a signal peptide for secretion, the α/β processing site (RXXR) for dividing into two subunit chains, two Cys residues involved in an inter-chain disulfide linkage between the α and β chains and a possible activation cleavage site (TTR) by the C3 convertase (Fig. 1, Table 1), suggesting that CiC3-3 is processed into α- and β-chains held together with the inter-chain disulfide bond similar to mammal C3s. The C3a anaphylatoxin (ANA) region of CiC3-3 contained the six Cys residues conserved by most C3a analyzed thus far. Since CiC3-1 and -2 possess only four of them, CiC3-3 showed a higher conservation in the C3a region. However, CiC3-3 lacked the thioester site, GCGEQ, and the catalytic His residue for cleavage of thioester. Moreover CiC3-3 also lacked the two Pro residues on both sides of the thioester site which are conserved even in human C5 lacking the thioester site. These results suggest that the 3D structure around the thioester site is markedly modified in CiC3-3 (highlighted in yellow and blue in Fig. 2, summarized in Table 1).
Fig. 2 Sequence comparison of CiC3-3, CiC3-1, CiC3-2 and the human C3, C4B, and C5. The multiple sequence alignment of CiC3-3 with human and other *C. intestinalis* C3s was performed with ClustalW. A2M_comp domain region is boxed. Proteolytic cleavage sites are shown in bold letters. Conserved Cys residues in the C3α anaphylatoxin region are marked (*). The inter-chain disulfide bridges between the α/β chains are shaded. The thioester sites, catalytic His sites and KR-rich insertion are also annotated in each colored box.
Phylogenetic analysis of A2M comp domain region to reveal independent loss of thioester site and catalytic His.

To reveal whether loss of the thioester site and catalytic His occurred independently in CiC3-3 and vertebrate C5 or not, we reconstructed a phylogenetic tree with the deduced amino acid sequences based on the A2M comp domain located at the C-terminal side of the thioester site. Although the size of the usual A2M comp domain is approximately 260 amino acid residues long, this domain of CiC3-3 expands to 336 residues due to an insertion of approximately 70 amino acid residues highly enriched in Lys and Arg. A similar Lys/Arg rich insertion has already been reported from two cnidarian C3s, Nv3-1, Nv3-2, although the insertion of cnidarian C3 was observed at the different region, much more C-terminal side. Therefore, the insertion of the Lys/Arg rich sequence into C3 occurred at least twice independently during the eumetazoa evolution. The NJ tree constructed using the amino acid sequences of the A2M comp domain showed the essentially the same topology as the tree based on the full length information described above, except that CiC3-3 is separated far from C3 family (Fig. 3). The long branch of CiC3-3 indicates that the primary structure of A2M comp region of CiC3-3 is highly divergent. Overall, these results indicate that CiC3 possesses well conserved domain organization similar to vertebrate C3/C4/C5 except for the thioester site and the subsequent A2M comp domain.

Spatial and temporal expression of the CiC3-3 gene

To understand the gene expression pattern of CiC3-3, we first analyzed transcriptome data on the C. intestinalis protein database (CIPRO) (Endo et al., 2011), and compared gene expressions among CiC3-1, CiC3-2 and CiC3-3. Both CiC3-1 and CiC3-2 were not expressed before the metamorphosis except for very slight expression in the tailbud stage, while both microarray and EST

Fig. 4 Comparison of expression intensities among CiC3-1, CiC3-2 and CiC3-3. CiC3-1, -2 and -3 are shown in light blue, light green and red, respectively. The bars represent the EST data, while the lines represent the microarray data (labeled as CiC3-1M, -2M -3M). Y axes of Graphs A and B indicate relative expression levels. The results of the EST and microarray analyses are shown on the left and right sides, respectively. A: Expression profiles during the life cycle of C. intestinalis. The left side of the graph indicates the expression intensity for EST data, while the right side of the graph denotes the expression intensity for microarray data. B: Expression profiles of adult tissues. The bars denote expression level estimated by the EST analysis.
Data showed that CiC3-3 was significantly expressed from the gastrula to the tailbud stage (Fig. 4A). The expression of CiC3-3 disappeared by the larva stage. After metamorphosis, CiC3-1 and CiC3-2 began to be expressed, whose intensities were getting stronger during maturation. In contrast to CiC3-1 and CiC3-2, CiC3-3 was not expressed by juvenile and was slightly expressed from the young adult to mature adult stages. The intensity of CiC3-3 expression in mature adults is approximately 1/5 of CiC3-1 and 1/7 of CiC3-2 (Fig. 4A). The weak expression of CiC3-3 was detected only in the blood cells. CiC3-1 was ubiquitously expressed except for ovary and endostyle, and CiC3-2 was expressed in heart and blood cell (Fig. 4B). These expression data indicate that CiC3-3 is expressed in a contradistinctive manner from CiC3-1 and CiC3-2.

To identify the spatial expression pattern of CiC3-3 during the development of C. intestinalis, we next performed whole mount in situ hybridization using RNA probes of CiC3-3. CiC3-3 began to be expressed in the invaginated cells of the early gastrulae (St. 11) (Fig. 5A). At the late gastrula stage (St. 13), almost all of the invaginated cells expressed CiC3-3. The CiC3-3 expression was then restricted in the anterior end of the embryos (St. 14), especially the anterior ventral side of the invaginated cells strongly expressed CiC3-3 (Figs 5D, E). The strong expression was observed in the endoderm of the trunk region, and weak expression was observed in the endoderm strand of the ventral midline of the tail region (St. 16 and 19) (Figs 5F, G, H). At the mid tailbud stage (St. 21) the CiC3-3 expression was reduced and restricted only in the endoderm cells around the endodermal cavity (Figs 5I, J). These expression data indicates that CiC3-3 is specifically expressed in the endoderm of embryos, and ceases its expression before hatching into the larvae.

**Discussion**

It had been reported that the number of complement C3 gene is one in H. roretzi, and two in C. intestinalis (Nonaka et al., 1999; Marino et al., 2002; Azumi et al., 2003). H. roretzi and C. intestinalis belong to the orders, Pleurogona and Enterogona, respectively, and are evolutionary far apart to each other (Turon et al., 2004). The phylogenetic analysis of C3 genes have indicated that the gene duplication event between CiC3-1 and CiC3-2 occurred in the Enterogona lineage after the divergence from Pleurogona (Marino et al., 2002). The newly found CiC3-3 clustered with vertebrate C3, C4 and C5, rather than with CiC3-1, CiC3-2 and H. roretzi C3, although bootstrap percentage to support this clustering was not very high. This finding indicates the presence of two ancient C3 lineages in basal tunicates, the CiC3-1, CiC3-2 and H. roretzi C3 lineage and the CiC3-3 lineage. Two and three C3 genes were reported from the genomes of a sea urchin, Strongylocentrotus purpuratus, and an amphioxus, Branchiostoma floridae, respectively (Hibino et al., 2006; Huang et al., 2008). Thus all the basal deuterotomes whose genomes have been elucidated so far contain more than two C3 genes. Phylogenetic analysis showed that the multiple C3 genes of each species form species-specific cluster, indicating that gene
duplications occurred multiple times in each lineage. CiC3-3 is exceptional in this aspect, suggesting a unique evolutionary history of this gene.

CiC3-1 and CiC3-2 retain almost all domains and structural features of vertebrate C3, suggesting that they function as the central component of the ascidian complement system. Actually, the C3a fragment of CiC3-1 was demonstrated to induce chemotaxis of C. intestinalis hemocytes in the same way as vertebrate C3a (Pinto et al. 2003). In contrast, CiC3-3 showed an unprecedentedly unique structure. First of all, CiC3-3 lacked the thioester site believed to be essential for covalent tagging of invading microorganisms by usual C3. Unlike vertebrate C5 which also lacks the thioester site but retains the basic residues of the thioester domain, CiC3-3 has a totally different sequence in this domain. Especially, the insertion of the highly Lys/Arg-rich sequence could have drastic structural and functional consequence since it provides extremely positive charge to this region. It is unlikely, therefore, that CiC3-3 play a similar function as vertebrate C3. However, the C3a region of CiC3-3 showed a higher conservation of Cys residues than those of CiC3-1 and CiC3-2, implicating in inflammatory process as anaphylatoxin.

In mammal, the C3 gene is mainly expressed in hepatocytes and macrophages (Lambris, 1988). In the ascidian H. roretzi, gastric caecum and blood cells have been identified as the sites of C3 gene expression (Nonaka et al., 1999). The paraffin sections of the stomach in the adult of C. intestinalis have shown that both CiC3-1 and CiC3-2 are expressed only in the one type of blood cell, but not in the wall of the stomach (Marino et al., 2002). Gene expression profile during the life cycle of C. intestinalis using the large-scale oligo-DNA microarray showed that not only CiC3-1 and CiC3-2, but also MASP, factor B, MBP and two genes of complement C6-like were expressed in the middle of the embryonic stages and maintained their expression level during the adult stages. In this study, CiC3-3 showed a totally different temporal expression pattern during the life cycle from the other complement component genes of C. intestinalis. CiC3-3 is prominently expressed during the embryonic stages when the other complement genes of C. intestinalis are hardly expressed. In adult stages, in contrast, CiC3-3 is expressed at a very low level, whereas the other complement genes are expressed abundantly. Since interactions among components are essential for complement activation, these results suggest that CiC3-3 functions outside of the complement system.

Whole mount in situ hybridization revealed that CiC3-3 was first expressed in the invaginating endoderm of the embryos. C. intestinalis develops in a direct developing manner, and the larvae do not undergo the differentiation of a functional gut. Thus, endodermal expression of CiC3-3 does not necessarily indicate digestive function. When the gastrulation began, the expression started in the middle of the embryonic region, and it was continuously seen invaginating cells from the head endoderm through the endoderm strand to the ventral blastopore. After closure of the blastopore, it was strongly expressed around the endodermal cavity in the trunk. This expression pattern indicates the possibility that CiC3-3 is involved in development of certain embryonic region.

Complement C3 genes have been reported from basic metazoans, cnidarian coral, Swilta exserta (Dishaw et al., 2005), and cnidarian sea anemone, Nemastoma vectensis (Kimura et al., 2009). Another coral, Acropora millepora C3 is expressed in undifferentiated endodermal cells of the embryos and larvae (Miller et al., 2007), while N. vectensis C3 is expressed in tentacles, pharynx, and mesentery in an endoderm-specific manner. Although all these cnidarian C3 possess the typical domain structure of vertebrate C3 unlike CiC3-3, a similar expression pattern during embryonic stages could imply that CiC3-3 and cnidarian C3 play some common developmental roles. If this is the actual case, cnidarian C3 has dual roles in development and immunity, which are divided into CiC3-3 and CiC3-1, 2, respectively in ascidians.

References


