

# DNA sequence variation in a non-coding region of low recombination on the human X chromosome

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DNA sequence variation has become a major source of insight regarding the origin and history of our species<sup>1–5</sup> as well as an important tool for the identification of allelic variants associated with disease. Comparative sequencing of DNA has to date focused mainly on mitochondrial (mt) DNA, which due to its apparent lack of recombination and high evolutionary rate lends itself well to the study of human evolution<sup>1</sup>. These advantages also entail limitations. For example, the high mutation rate of mtDNA results in multiple substitutions that make phylogenetic analysis difficult and, because mtDNA is maternally inherited, it reflects only the history of females. For the history of males, the non-recombining part of the paternally inherited Y chromosome can be studied<sup>2</sup>. The extent of variation on the Y chromosome is so low that variation at particular sites known to be polymorphic rather than entire sequences are typically determined<sup>6</sup>. It is currently unclear how some forms of analysis (such as the coalescent) should be applied to such data. Furthermore, the lack of recombination means that selection at

any locus affects all 59 Mb of DNA. To gauge the extent and pattern of point substitutional variation in non-coding parts of the human genome, we have sequenced 10 kb of non-coding DNA in a region of low recombination at Xq13.3. Analysis of this sequence in 69 individuals representing all major linguistic groups reveals the highest overall diversity in Africa, whereas deep divergences also exist in Asia. The time elapsed since the most recent common ancestor (MRCA) is  $535,000 \pm 119,000$  years. We expect this type of nuclear locus to provide more answers about the genetic origin and history of humans.

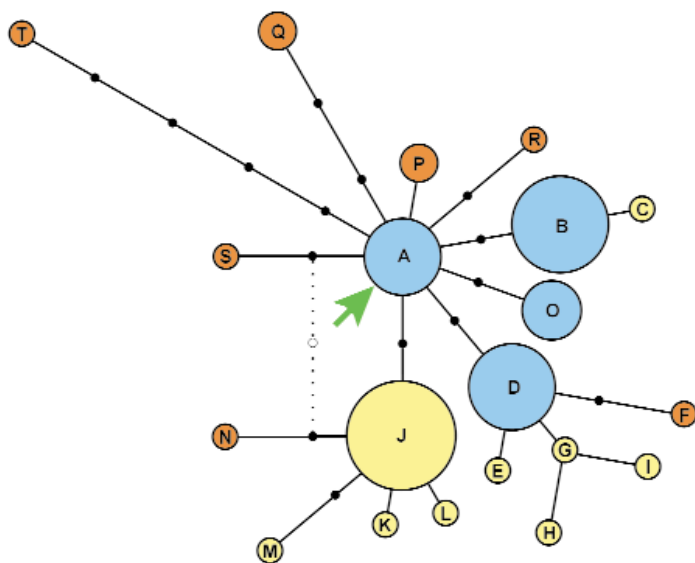
Population studies of nuclear DNA sequences have recently been published for genes encoding  $\beta$ -globin<sup>3</sup>, lipoprotein lipase<sup>4</sup> and pyruvate dehydrogenase E1  $\alpha$ -subunit<sup>5</sup>. Although these loci have yielded interesting results, their involvement in haemoglobinopathies<sup>7</sup>, cardiovascular disease<sup>8</sup> and neurological conditions<sup>9</sup>, respectively, make them likely targets for selection. Furthermore, at least in the first two genes, relatively high recombination rates make evolutionary inference difficult. For several



**Fig. 1** Map of the world indicating the approximate origins of the individuals studied. The individuals belong to the following language phyla (numbers correspond to those in Fig. 2): Khoisan (8, 65, 66), Niger-Kordofanian (5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 24, 26, 27, 34, 57, 58, 63, 64, 67, 68, 69), Nilo-Saharan (25), Afro-Asiatic (23), Caucasian (4), Indo-Hittite (14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 30, 36, 53, 61), Uralic-Yukaghir (28, 29, 35), Altaic (15, 16, 38, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 55, 60), Chukchi-Kamchatkan (3), Eskimo-Aleut (54), Elamo-Dravidian (17), Sino-Tibetan (39, 40, 41, 42), Austric (13, 33, 47, 51), Indo-Pacific (31, 32, 52, 59, 62), Australian (1, 2) and Amerind (37, 50, 56).

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**Fig. 3** Phylogenetic network relating Xq13.3 sequences. Letters refer to Fig. 2. Red circles represent sequences observed only in Africa, yellow circles represent sequences observed only outside Africa and blue circles represent sequences observed in Africa as well as in other regions of the world. The area of the circles represents the number of individuals carrying each sequence. The location of the most likely root is indicated by a green arrow. The dotted line and open circle indicate an equally parsimonious mutational pathway not seen in the maximum likelihood tree.

on the branches to sequences T and O. In addition, a phylogenetic analysis with a maximum likelihood approach<sup>21</sup> also identified sequence A as the root when either the chimpanzee and/or the gorilla sequences were used as outgroups. The coalescent analysis allows the human effective population size to be estimated at 16,000 and the age of the MRCA to  $535,000 \pm 119,000$  years. Because the effective population size of the X chromosome is three times that of mtDNA and the Y chromosome and three-quarters that of autosomes, this age agrees well with the estimates of the age of the MRCAs for mtDNA and Y chromosomal sequences, which fall 100,000–200,000 years ago<sup>1,2,27</sup>, and for  $\beta$ -globin gene sequences, which are  $750,000 \pm 210,000$  years<sup>3</sup>.

The resulting phylogenetic tree reveals genetic patterns of early human history. Sequence A, which is likely to be ancestral to all other sequences in the tree, is found in four Africans, two Aboriginal Australians, one Chukchi and one Georgian. Thus, in addition to Africans, Aboriginal Australians as well as other Asians carry ancient sequences, an observation consistent with other work<sup>3,28</sup>. Africans, however, are more widely distributed in the tree than non-Africans. Focusing on the nine branches originating from the ancestral sequence A (Fig. 3), one or more Africans are represented in all nine branches, whereas non-Africans are found in four. The wider distribution of African sequences is reflected in higher genetic diversity. For example, the mean pairwise sequence difference among the Africans ( $3.6 \pm 2.0$  differences per 10,163 bp) is almost as large as that of the entire data set ( $3.7 \pm 2.0$ ), whereas it tends to be lower in non-Africans ( $3.1 \pm 1.9$ ). Moreover, 24 of 33 variable positions were found in Africa, whereas 17 were found in the rest of the world, in spite of the fact that more than twice as many non-Africans ( $n=47$ ) than Africans ( $n=22$ ) were sequenced. The age of the MRCA excludes a divergence of one million years or more ( $P=0.0028$ ), a time depth expected if genetic continuity between *Homo erectus* and modern human populations had occurred for this locus<sup>29</sup> in several regions of the world. On balance, the overall pattern is most easily reconciled with an African origin for the sequence variation observed at Xq13.3, even if other scenarios cannot be excluded. The older sequences that exist in Asia warrant further work in light of recent suggestions of an early coastal migration from the Horn of Africa to Australia approximately 120,000 years ago<sup>30</sup>. Another notable feature of the network is that a large proportion of individuals from Asia carry

sequence J, something that requires further investigation with regard to its possible association with past demographic events, such as the spread of rice agriculture.

On a general note, loci such as Xq13.3 represent a class of nuclear loci that are very useful for evolutionary analyses. Since their substitution and recombination rates are low, their history within humans can be reconstructed with less ambiguity than for mtDNA, where the mutation rate results in multiple substitutions, or for nuclear loci, where recombination rates are higher. Furthermore, because they can be chosen to be located far away from genes, the distorting effects of selection are minimized. As the general problem that selection may affect any particular locus cannot be excluded, several such loci need to be studied to arrive at a comprehensive picture of the origin and evolutionary history of the human gene pool.

## Methods

**PCR and sequencing primers.** All primers were synthesized and HPLC purified by MWG Biotech. Sequencing primers were labelled with CY5. Oligonucleotide sequences were based on the PAC-clone sequence 333E23. The target region was amplified from each DNA sample in 9 overlapping segments and sequenced using 47 sequencing primers.

**Sexing.** The sex of the Asian Indian, Aboriginal Australian, Filipino, Korean and Thai DNA samples was determined as described<sup>31</sup>.

**DNA amplification.** DNA (100 ng) was used in PCR reactions (25  $\mu$ l) with primers (10 pmol each), standard buffer (Perkin Elmer), dNTP (200  $\mu$ M) and *Taq* polymerase (1 U; Perkin Elmer). Amplifications were performed in a Gradient 96 Robocycler (Stratagene). The reactions were initiated with a denaturation at 94 °C for 3 min, followed by 33 cycles of denaturation at 94 °C for 60 s, annealing at 61 °C for 60 s and elongation at 72 °C for 2 min, 10 s. A final extension step was performed at 72 °C for 4 min.

**Sequencing.** To remove unincorporated PCR primers and mononucleotides, PCR products were treated with exonuclease I (0.2  $\mu$ l, 10 U/ $\mu$ l; USB) and shrimp alkaline phosphatase (1.8  $\mu$ l, 1 U/ $\mu$ l; Amersham) and incubated in a thermal cycler (MJ Research) at 37 °C for 20 min followed by enzyme inactivation at 80 °C for 15 min. Purified PCR product (1.25  $\mu$ l) served as template in sequencing reactions (7  $\mu$ l) with sequencing primer (1 pmol), standard buffer (Pharmacia Biotech), ThermoSequenase (Amersham) and deoxy- and dideoxynucleotide triphosphates (Pharmacia Biotech) as recommended by the suppliers. Following an initial denaturation at 94 °C for 3 min, the reactions were incubated for 30 cycles at 94 °C

for 40 s, 61 °C for 1 min and 68 °C for 40 s. Sequencing reactions (5 µl) were run on Alf-Express sequencers (Pharmacia Biotech) using 5.5% Long-Ranger (FMC Bio Products) gels. Running conditions were as recommended by the supplier.

**Analyses.** ALFWIN software (Pharmacia) was used for base-calling. Sequences and trace-data were transferred to the SEQMAN program (DNASTAR), which was used for sequence assembly. SEQMAN was also used for the final alignment of the complete sequences (10,163 bp) and subsequent identification of variable nucleotide positions. The program AvH2 (unpublished data) was used for calculation of mean pairwise sequence differences. The clock test was performed using the program PUZZLE 4.0 (ref. 21). The time to the MRCA was estimated by the Genetree package<sup>26</sup> (<http://www.maths.monash.edu.au/~mbahlo/mpg/gtree.html>), excluding variable position 11. The time back to the MRCA was calculated assuming a global panmictic population and the maximum likelihood value for  $\theta$ . The root depicted was determined using the Genetree package and the human sequences. The location of the root was confirmed phylogenetically, assuming a TN model with  $\gamma$ -distributed evolutionary rates as implemented in PUZZLE 4.0 (ref. 21). The absence of putative exons in the

sequence studied was confirmed using the Grail program (<http://compbio.ornl.gov/manuals/grail-genquest.9407.shtml>).

**Accession numbers.** PAC-clone sequence 333E23, GenBank Z82200; 69 human sequences (order as in Fig. 2), and chimpanzee and gorilla sequences, EBI AJ241023–AJ241093.

*Note added in proof:* One Navajo representing the single language phylum missing in Fig. 1 (Na-DeNe) has now been sequenced. He carries sequence G.

#### Acknowledgements

We thank L. Cavalli-Sforza, H. Chew Kiat, G. Destro-Bisol, L. Excoffier, T. Jenkins, L. Jorde, P. Karanth, K. Kidd, J. Kidd, G. Klein, R. Mahabeer, V. Nasidze, E. Poloni, C. Roos, H. Soodyall, M. Stoneking, J. Friedlaender, C. Tyler-Smith, M. Vovoda and S. Wells for DNA samples; R. Erlandsson, L. Vigilant, G. Weiss, J. Wilson and S. Zoellner for constructive discussions and help; and the DFG and the MPG for financial support.

Received 14 January; accepted 31 March 1999.

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