



Original article

Metatranscriptomic analysis reveals co-expression pattern of mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) genes among different species of bony fishes in muscle tissue

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ABSTRACT

Mitochondrion is an organelle responding to providing cell energy by oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) reaction. In the mitochondrial genome of animals, 13 important protein-coding genes (ND1, ND2, ND3, ND4, ND4L, ND5, ND6, CTYB, COX1, COX2, COX3 ATP6, ATP8) play important roles on mediating the OXPHOS reaction. The study is to compare the expressional level of 13 mitochondrial PCGs among muscle of diverse fish species to ask whether the 13 PCGs expressional level is correlated to fish living habitat or phylogenetic position. We used a metatranscriptomic approach to explore the expression level of 13 PCGs among diverse fish species (24 bony fish and one cartilaginous fish) by downloading the raw next-generation data from the NCBI SRA database and using two commercial software of Geneious and CLCBio to perform gene mapping and gene expression profiling. Principal component analysis (PCA) and hierarchy clustering were utilized to study the gene or species relationship based on 13 PCGs' expression pattern. Based on the results, we discovered the expression pattern of PCG genes derived from the same OXPHOS complex is closer to each other showing co-expression or co-regulation relationship. The 13 PCGs expression profile was not co-related to fish living habitats but instead, well correlated to their phylogenetic position. The clustering results for 13 PCGs' expressional patterns showed bony fish and cartilaginous fish were grouped into two distinct clades. For bony fish clades, all COX genes displayed high expression patterns while for the cartilaginous clade, the CYTB gene was highly expressed with the low expression level of COX3. In conclusion, by using the metatranscriptomic approach, we were able to explore and compare the gene expression profiles of 13 PCGs from diverse fish species for the first time. The co-expression pattern of 13 PCGs discovered in fish was well consistent with previous observations done in plants or mammals. However, one has to keep in mind that the current finding results were based only on one example of a cartilaginous fish that was accessible in the SRA database. Thus, future studies are needed by constructing more additional cartilaginous fish muscle transcriptomes.

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1. Introduction

As an important component in establishing a foundation for the management and protection of biological variety, genetic information lead researchers to resolve the evolutionary histories of various biological species. Recently, some researchers proposed that in order to distinguish all, or at least the vast majority of, animal species, a single gene sequence such as mitochondrial DNA, one of the most useful information sources for metazoans, would be sufficient. The barcode sequence of the cytochrome c oxidase

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subunit 1 (COX1) gene is one example of a single gene in mitogenomes sequence that becomes a useful tool for species identification as a global bio-identification system for animals. In addition, this barcode sequence has been thoroughly collected in the Barcode of Life project (Iwasaki et al., 2013; Ward et al., 2005). Nowadays, over 1500 proteins are considered to be involved in the function of mitochondria, the organelles that capable to produce cellular energy (adenosine triphosphate, ATP) and located in eukaryotic cells. From those proteins, 13 proteins are encoded by the mitochondrial (mt) genome, the organelle's own genome, while the rest of these proteins are encoded by the nuclear genome (Shao and Barker, 2007). Because of its relatively simple structure, predominant female inheritance, and high rate of evolution, mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) becomes one of the helpful tools in studies of phylogenetics, phylogeography, molecular evolution, and population and conservation genetics. On the vertebrates, the mitochondrial genome composes of a circular molecule with a variety of sizes among 16–19 kb. Normally, it consists of 37 genes encoding 22 transfer RNAs, 13 protein-coding genes, 2 ribosomal RNAs, and a variable control region (CR) or D-loop (Prosdocimi et al., 2012). These protein-coding genes are composed of 7 NADH dehydrogenase subunits (ND1, 2, 3, 4, 4L, 5, and 6), 3 cytochrome *c* oxidase subunits (COX1, 2, and 3), 2 ATP synthetase subunits (ATPase 6 and 8), and cytochrome *b* (CYTB). Furthermore, substitution patterns in these protein-coding genes follow some relatively well-understood rules. Therefore, by this regularity in the way in which mutations accumulate, protein-coding genes become attractive candidates for phylogenetic studies of fish (Beaumont, 1994).

Besides their important role in the ecology of the hydrosphere and the evolution of vertebrates, fish mitogenomic sequence data have provided a fruitful source of information to identify new fish species and elucidating fish phylogenies (Imoto et al., 2013; Iwasaki et al., 2013; Poulsen et al., 2009). Unfortunately, since sufficient resolution of higher-level relationships of organisms seemingly needs longer DNA sequences than those currently being analyzed, deficiencies of resources and time give adversities to obtain such sequences from many taxa. However, these difficulties in molecular systematics of fishes have been solved by the development of a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)-based approach to sequence the complete mitochondrial genome (mitogenome). This approach uses a long PCR technique and plentiful fish-versatile PCR primers. With this approach, technical difficulties in character sampling to sequence whole mt genomes also have been partially alleviated. In addition, it is also capable to produce accurately homologous characters that are needed to improve the phylogenies estimation as well (Miya et al., 2001). Mitochondrial DNA regions have been well studied in fishes with the aids of PCR amplification with universal primer sequences or next-generation sequencing (NGS) technologies (Kocher and Stepien, 1997).

The protein-coding genes from mtDNA play an essential role in ATP production. In the most living teleost fish normal condition, production of muscle energy occurred when the tissue enzymes burn or oxidize fat or glycogen in a chain of reactions while carbon dioxide (CO₂), water, and the energy-rich organic compound ATP were produced during this process. This type of respiration happens in two stages: an aerobic and an anaerobic, which depends on the continued presence of oxygen (O₂) (Huss, 1995). However, some fish contractile systems are adapted and evolved to be effectively functioned in order to live at a distinct temperature range. Previous research revealed some fish that capable to rebuild their myofibrillar system for cold or warm temperatures swimming to adapt to diverse environmental temperatures on a seasonal basis (Duan et al., 2018). Furthermore, it was also found that the specific ATPase activity in the Antarctic fish was much higher than tropical or temperate fish at a given measurement temperature. The adaptation process to cold temperature in a latitudinal cline is related to

the increment of mitochondrial densities in fish muscle. High densities of mitochondrial and/or increased capacities of mitochondrial enzymes occurred as a rise in aerobic capacity. Furthermore, another study also found that during acclimation to cold and warm temperatures, the myofibrils ATPase activity from carp muscle was altered (Hoar et al., 2000). It has been known that mitochondria play an important role in those processes, as they are the main site of ATP production, thus, their capacity and density reflecting aerobic energy turnover in animals (Lucassen et al., 2006). Therefore, based on these findings, the 13 PGCs expression profile from bony fish mtDNA was studied in order to discover whether its expression is co-related to the fish living habitat condition or not.

The bony fish is the largest class of vertebrates and bony fish consisting of 45 orders, and over 435 families and 28,000 species. This extraordinary taxonomic diversity is associated with a remarkable variety of morphological features and adaptations to very different habitats, ranging from freshwater and seawater, and it has made bony fish species a very attractive subject for the present study. Besides their importance in aquaculture, some bony fish, including salmon, tuna, carp, and eel, are also economically important for humans.

In the present day, many fish phylogenies at various taxonomic levels with highly congruent result trees and strong statistical support with those originated from independent nuclear were resolved by whole mitogenome sequences with extensive taxon sampling. In spite of these efforts, many phylogenetic problems for many distinct clades of fish where the diversity surpasses several hundred or thousands of species remain unsolved (Saitoh et al., 2006). Moreover, the transcriptomic features of some diverse fish muscles in terms of gene expression levels of the protein-coding genes (PGCs) are very little known about. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to compare the gene expression levels of 13 PGCs in the muscle among some diverse fishes. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to evaluate the gene or species relationship based on bony fish mtDNA 13 PGCs' expression pattern. We studied fish from a different family, environmental temperature, and rate of evolution. By comparing the gene expression patterns in the genetically diverse fish species, our present data set extends the more precise phylogenies at several taxonomic levels of fish.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Handling with RNAseq data

The fish muscle's NGS reads were downloaded from the ftp site of Sequence Read Archive (SRA) in the DDBJ database (http://trace.ddbj.nig.ac.jp/dra/index_e.html) by FileZilla software (<https://filezilla-project.org/>) and then converted into fastq format by using NCBI sratoolkit (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Traces/sra/?view=software>). The raw NGS reads of muscle from each fish species were *de novo* assembled into contigs by CLCBio software (<http://www.clcbio.com/>, Qiagen, CA, United States) with default parameters settings (k-mer = 23 and bubble size = 50). The complete mitogenome sequence can be elucidated from the raw NGS reads by performing *de novo* assembly and repeatedly mapping strategy as described in our previous paper (Shen et al., 2016).

2.2. Calculation of mitochondrial protein coding genes expression level

Initially, the full-length mitochondrial DNA sequences were downloaded from NCBI and imported into Geneious software (Biomatters, Ltd., Auckland, New Zealand). The 13 PGCs sequences for each fish species were identified by the BLAST search. The

assembled PCG contigs were later exported from CLCBio software and imported into Geneious software to perform In-house BLAST (Liu, 2018). We used tBLASTN to search the potential contigs coding the 13 PCGs with an e-value cutoff setting at $1e-5$. The potential contig was later compared by using BLASTX against the Refseq database to validate the gene annotation with an e-value cutoff $1e-5$. For gene expression calculation, the raw reads were mapped to the assembled contigs by CLCBio software and the relative expression level was calculated as RPKM (reads per kilobase of exon per million reads mapped).

2.3. Hierarchical Clustering, heatmap Generation, and PCA analysis

In order to compare the relative gene expression pattern of 13 PCGs in muscle tissues among diverse fish species, we used hierarchical clustering and PCA analysis approach. The output of clustering can help us to understand the relation between two fish species that based on the PCG expression levels. The relative contig number and RPKM values for each PCG in different fish species were summarized in excel format. To further mining gene expression patterns, we performed PCA analysis by using SIMCA-P software (Umetrics, Umeå, Sweden, <https://umetrics.com/products/simca>) to reduce high dimensional data down to lower dimensions and generate a 3D plot for data visualization according to default settings. Heatmap with hierarchical clustering was generated using R (R Core Development Team 2018, <https://www.R-project.org>) with superheat plugin.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Overview of our study strategy

To compare the mitochondrial protein coding gene expression levels in the muscle from diverse fish species, we adapted a meta-transcriptomic approach by using the strategy summarized in Fig. 1. First, muscle RNA transcriptomic data of 25 fish species from the NCBI Sequence Read Archive (SRA) database were downloaded. Among 25 fish species, transcriptomic data of muscle from two fish species *Trichiurus lepturus* (SRR3321882) and *Harpadon nehereus* (SRR3387959) have been published in our previous study (Zhang et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the rest of 23 fish species muscle transcriptomic data were procured from the NCBI SRA database. The fish species and its basic information that were used to perform meta-transcriptomic analysis were listed in Fig. 2 and Table 1. The next-generation sequencing (NGS) data used for mapping analysis size was around 3–15 Gb and the majority of those NGS data were generated by Illumina HiSeq 2000 platform as paired-end reads. Later, the complete mitogenome sequence of 25 fish species was downloaded from the NCBI database and 13 protein-coding genes (PCGs) for each fish species were extracted from it as bait (Cheng et al., 2017). The RNAseq raw reads information used to perform meta-transcriptomic analysis were summarized in Table 1. Afterward, the RNAseq short reads were mapped to 13 mitogenome PCGs for each fish species by using the mapping tool from a commercial software CLCBio. The relative expression levels of 13 PCGs were calculated and normalized as Reads per Kilobase Million mapped reads (RPKM) (Table 2).

3.2. Principal component analysis (PCA) based on fish species or PCGs

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is an analysis method that can be used to reduce the data complexity from high to low dimensions and perform multivariate analysis for Omics data (Saccenti and Timmerman, 2016; Wiklund, 2008). According to the principle, fish species with similar gene expression patterns

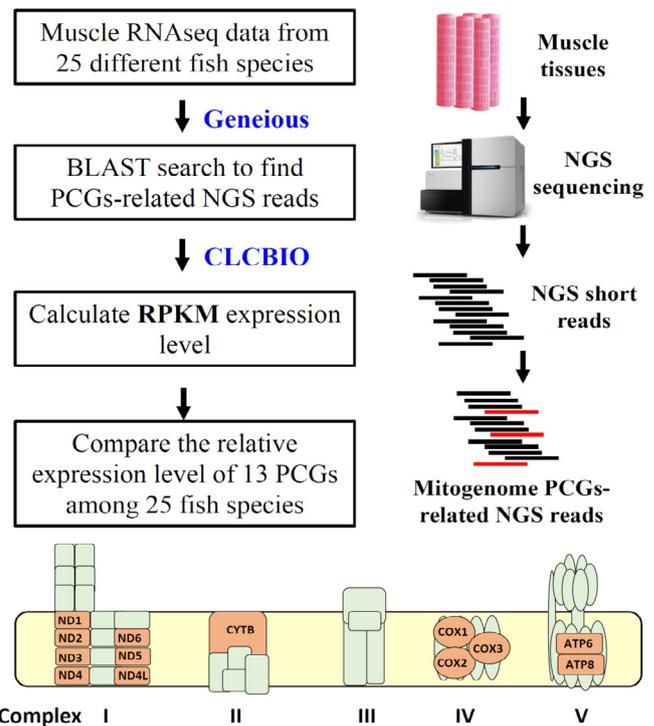


Fig. 1. Summary of the analysis strategy and next-generation sequencing (NGS) data used in this study. The raw next-generation data were downloaded from the NCBI SRA database and two commercial software of Geneious and CLCBio were used to perform gene mapping and gene expression calculation (upper panel). The 13 protein-coding genes (PCGs) are major components of mitochondrial genes essential for oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) reaction (bottom panel).

will display a close PCA grouping relationship. Initially, we performed PCA grouping based on the fish species by combining all of the mitochondria PCGs expression levels from single a species (Fig. 3A). The result showed that 24 bony fish species were grouped together (pink color) while the cartilaginous fish species (*Callorhynchus milii*) was clearly separated by the bony fish species group to form an outgroup (yellow color). Later, PCA grouping based on all fish PCGs expression levels was performed (Fig. 3B). The result demonstrated three genes derived from OXPHOS complex IV, which were COX1, COX2, and COX3, were grouped together (yellow color) while the other PCGs, including ND1, ND2, ND3, ND4, ND4L, ND5, and ND6, from complex I, CYTB from complex II, and ATP6 and ATP8 from complex V were adequately connected into another group (pink color).

3.3. Heatmap gene clustering analysis for PCGs expression among 25 fish species

To gain better insight into the relationship analysis between 13 PCGs expression within diverse fish species, two-dimensional hierarchical clustering analysis was performed and a superheatmap for data visualization was generated (Fig. 4). Based on the 13 PCGs expression signatures, all of the teleost fish species were clustered together in a single lineage while the Australian ghost shark (*Callorhynchus millii*), a cartilaginous fish, displayed an outgroup relationship to other teleost fish. This clustering was primarily due to the relatively low expression level of the COX3 gene and the high expression level of CYTB genes of this fish compared to the teleost fish species tested in this study. Furthermore, we discovered all of the COX (COX1, COX2, and COX3) genes in OXPHOS complex IV were clustered in a single clade while the other 10 PCGs (ND, ATP, and CYTB genes) were grouped together in another

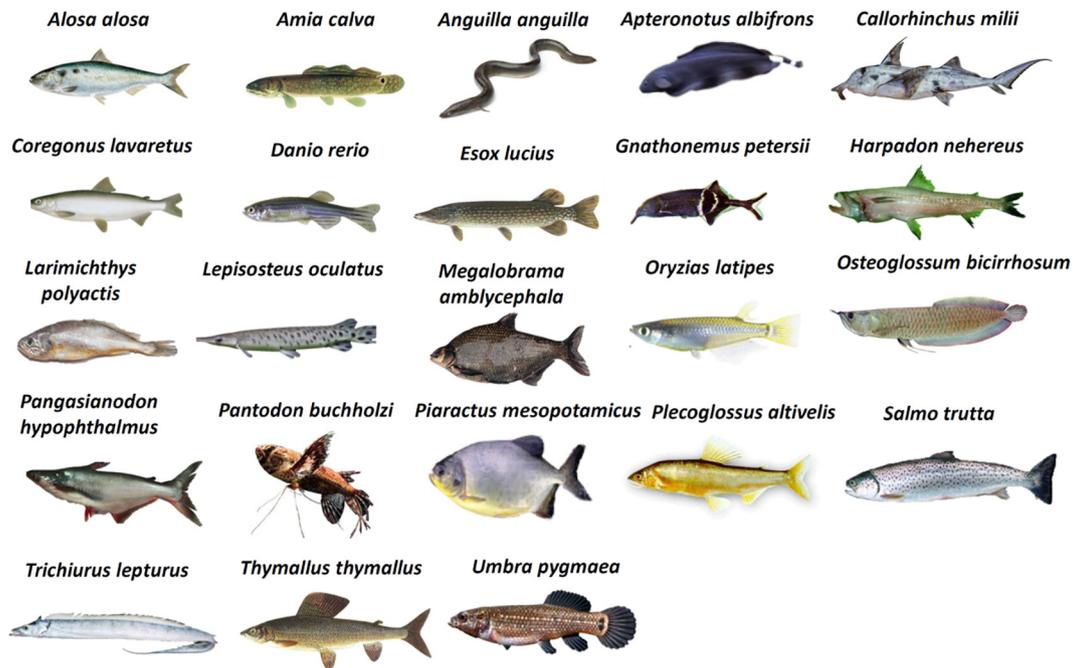


Fig. 2. Twenty-five fish species used to perform gene expression profiling comparison. The species name and outlook for all fish species used in this study were summarized.

Table 1

Summary of muscle transcriptomes from 25 fish species downloaded from the NCBI SRA database.

Species name	Habitat	Transcriptome data	NGS bases (Gbp)	Sequencer	Mitogenome ID
<i>Alosa alosa</i>	SW ^a	SRR1532803	7.3	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_009575
<i>Amia calva</i>	FW ^b	SRR1524264	6.5	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_004742
<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	FW ^b	SRR1532760	4.4	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_006531
<i>Apteronotus albifrons</i>	FW ^b	SRR1532750	5.8	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_004692
<i>Callorhynchus milii</i>	SW ^a	SRR514104	11.1	Illumina Genome Analyzer II	NC_014285
<i>Coregonus lavaretus</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533677	6.1	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_002646
<i>Danio rerio</i>	FW ^b	SRR1524241	6.8	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_002333
<i>Esox lucius</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533655	6.0	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_004593
<i>Gnathonemus petersii</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533701	7.0	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_012717
<i>Harpadon nehereus</i>	SW ^a	SRR3387959	6.9	NextSeq 500	NC_019645
<i>Larimichthys polyactis</i>	SW ^a	SRR3029231	10.8	Illumina Hiseq 2500	NC_013754
<i>Lepisosteus oculatus</i>	FW ^b	SRR1524253	5.9	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_004744
<i>Megalobrama amblycephala</i>	FW ^b	SRR1613325	3.6	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_010341
<i>Oryzias latipes</i>	FW ^b	SRR1524274	7.3	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_004387
<i>Osteoglossum bicirrhosum</i>	FW ^b	SRR1532792	5.3	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_003095
<i>Pangasianodon hypophthalmus</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533644	5.8	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_021752
<i>Pantodon buchholzi</i>	FW ^b	SRR1532771	4.3	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_003096
<i>Paramisgurnus dabryanus</i>	FW ^b	SRR1652342	10.8	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_023803
<i>Perca fluviatilis</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533689	7.8	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_026313
<i>Piaractus mesopotamicus</i>	FW ^b	SRR1056356	13.2	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_024940
<i>Plecoglossus altivelis</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533711	5.1	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_002734
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	FW ^b	SRR1532781	8.6	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_024032
<i>Thymallus thymallus</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533666	4.8	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_012928
<i>Trichiurus lepturus</i>	SW ^a	SRR3321882	15.8	NextSeq 500	NC_018791
<i>Umbra pygmaea</i>	FW ^b	SRR1533633	5.3	Illumina Hiseq 2000	NC_022456

^a Seawater.

^b Freshwater.

lineage. Overall, similar grouping was observed from the PCA and hierarchical clustering results. By Omic analysis, it was intriguing to discover the relatively high expression level of COX genes in OXPHOS complex IV compared to the other 10 PCGs in bony fish, concluding COX genes as highly expressed transcript genes in 24 bony fish muscle studied (Fig. 4).

In addition, according to the heatmap result, the PCG genes derived from the same OXPHOS complex were grouped closer to each other and showed a co-expression pattern. This result is consistent with previously published results that showed the

transcriptional co-expression and the co-regulation relationship of genes coding for components of the oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) system in plant (Gonzalez et al., 2007) and mammals (van Waveren and Moraes, 2008). Furthermore, this grouping relationship suggested that the 13 PCGs expression pattern was not correlated to their living habitat (freshwater VS seawater, displayed by pink and purple color codes in the bottom panel of Fig. 4), but instead, it was correlated to their phylogenetic position (bony VS cartilaginous fish, displayed by green and yellow color codes in the bottom panel of Fig. 4). For example, the Australian ghost shark

Table 2
The normalized gene expression RPKM (reads per kilobase per million mapped reads) levels for 13 protein coding genes among 25 diverse fish species. The expressional difference of 13 protein coding genes can be more easily distinguished after performing hierarchal clustering in Fig. 4.

Gene	ATP6	ATP8	COX1	COX2	COX3	CYTB	ND1	ND2	ND3	ND4	ND4L	ND5	ND6
<i>Piaractus mesopotamicus</i>	54,699	51,365	259,075	180,357	134,617	147,917	16,444	32,746	15,211	34,513	23,646	15,560	24,358
<i>Danio rerio</i>	100,623	12,268	280,608	123,039	190,582	86,933	22,838	32,868	17,302	27,851	6,816	20,009	39,004
<i>Lepisosteus oculatus</i>	67,606	0	259,874	342,973	95,725	70,925	29,643	60,846	0	25,114	19,462	9,103	11,137
<i>Amia calva</i>	82,754	0	170,310	383,940	312,065	57,928	38,703	18,055	0	13,663	0	15,365	0
<i>Oryzias latipes</i>	44,480	0	299,180	161,205	206,665	95,408	25,966	12,044	7,254	29,331	17,048	11,013	29,099
<i>Apteronotus albifrons</i>	151,136	0	165,426	502,108	74,062	22,617	73,238	36,866	0	51,389	21,723	10,559	12,359
<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	50,838	41,336	331,311	251,246	115,004	91,374	0	13,291	0	25,143	0	7,540	0
<i>Pantodon buchholzi</i>	32,854	0	267,007	634,157	14,295	0	0	43,050	0	24,408	0	18,240.19	0
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	45,403	0	280,324	242,694	110,773	152,422	0	23,662	17,797	13,493	0	27,020	11,899
<i>Osteoglossum bicirrhosum</i>	153,894	0	294,078	152,335	218,179	46,128	27,074	37,774	0	28,583	0	0	0
<i>Alosa alosa</i>	47,013	40,957	323,851	258,899	137,323	86,436	9,410	4,390	13,144	14,947	15,445	12,492	13,181
<i>Umbra pygmaea</i>	33,658	0	339,586	99,805	292,847	30,328	11,789	21,936	0	33,293	0	18,720	0
<i>Pangasianodon hypophthalmus</i>	74,591	0	243,424	162,438	117,139	188,300	5,233	48,870	0	22,167	0	33,511	9,831
<i>Esox lucius</i>	90,232	0	267,817	222,643	195,982	40,593	15,779	73,260	0	22,280	0	0	88,417
<i>Thymallus thymallus</i>	44,984	45,788	213,262	222,643	166,585	175,285	47,337	21,978	0	33,421	0	8,366	29,472
<i>Coregonus lavaretus</i>	0	253,293	246,924	246,328	27,104	242,415	0	20,263	60,964	30,813	0	0	40,760
<i>Perca fluviatilis</i>	48,330	0	303,723	275,083	84,224	57,945	0	102,713	0	11,969	27,826	8,988	47,497
<i>Gnathonemus petersii</i>	80,226	0	254,654	208,156	78,527	66,032	126,839	26,217	19,626	0	46,123	48,339	13,121
<i>Plecoglossus altivelis</i>	61,342	0	403,529	156,862	71,176	122,577	7,172	6,654	0	5,064	0	1,901	6,698
<i>Megalobrama amblycephala</i>	122,221	123,442	184,018	214,688	195,316	84,927	36,146	46,872	18,960	37,515	24,699	23,600	35,816
<i>Paramisgurnus dabryanus</i>	37,974	0	276,319	131,562	314,736	102,439	13,320	24,808	0	18,781	0	7,062	24,879
<i>Larimichthys polyactis</i>	144,315	16,031	253,442	109,282	226,341	76,924	23,125	41,502	19,896	33,622	18,845	13,485	25,614
<i>Trichinurus lepturus</i>	146,184	17,695	167,435	189,762	224,981	107,482	63,129	42,153	24,372	17,259	7,290	21,998	49,081
<i>Harpadon nehereus</i>	31,215	15,875	432,080	147,910	166,415	37,322	5,295	15,637	6,586	2,671	2,341	1,195	0
<i>Callorhynchus milii</i>	63,565	0	55,741	104,868	0	355,962	105,676	69,543	41,527	73,728	0	31,782	83,292

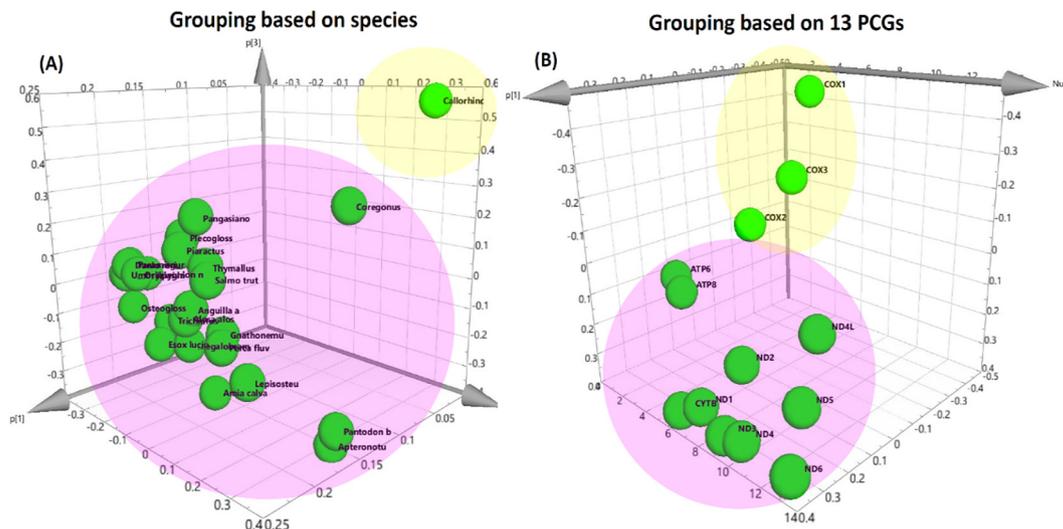


Fig. 3. Three-dimensional principal component analysis (PCA) of 13 protein-coding genes (PCGs) in muscle tissues from 25 diverse fish species. (A) PCA grouping based on fish species. (B) PCA grouping based on 13 PCGs.

displayed a relatively low expression level of COX3 and high expression level of CYTB genes while all of the teleost fish species tested displayed a relatively high COX1/2/3 gene expression levels in muscle tissues. However, it is also worth noting that our current finding results are based on only one example of a cartilaginous fish that was accessible in SRA database. Future studies by constructing more additional cartilaginous fish muscle transcriptomes are considered necessary to get a more solid conclusion.

4. Conclusion

In the current study, we performed a metatranscriptomic analysis of fish muscle. From the results, we discovered interesting findings that showed the co-expressional pattern of OXPHOS genes in bony fish. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study

that discovered the bony fish OXPHOS genes co-expressional pattern in the muscle by performing a metatranscriptomic analysis. From the grouping based on the fish species, the Australian ghost shark (*Callorhynchus milii*), a cartilaginous fish, displayed a different group to other teleost fish while all of the teleost fish species were grouped together in a single cluster. Meanwhile, from the grouping based on the 13 PCGs, we discovered all of the COX (COX1, COX2, and COX3) genes in OXPHOS complex IV were clustered in a single clade leaving the other 10 PCGs (ND, ATP, and CYTB genes) in another clade. Taken together, this grouping relationship suggested that the 13 PCGs expression pattern was rather correlated to their phylogenetic position than to their living habitat. This approach opens a great avenue to explore the expression pattern of 13 PCGs in other fish or animal species. For example, how it will be when the muscle tissue derived from fish,

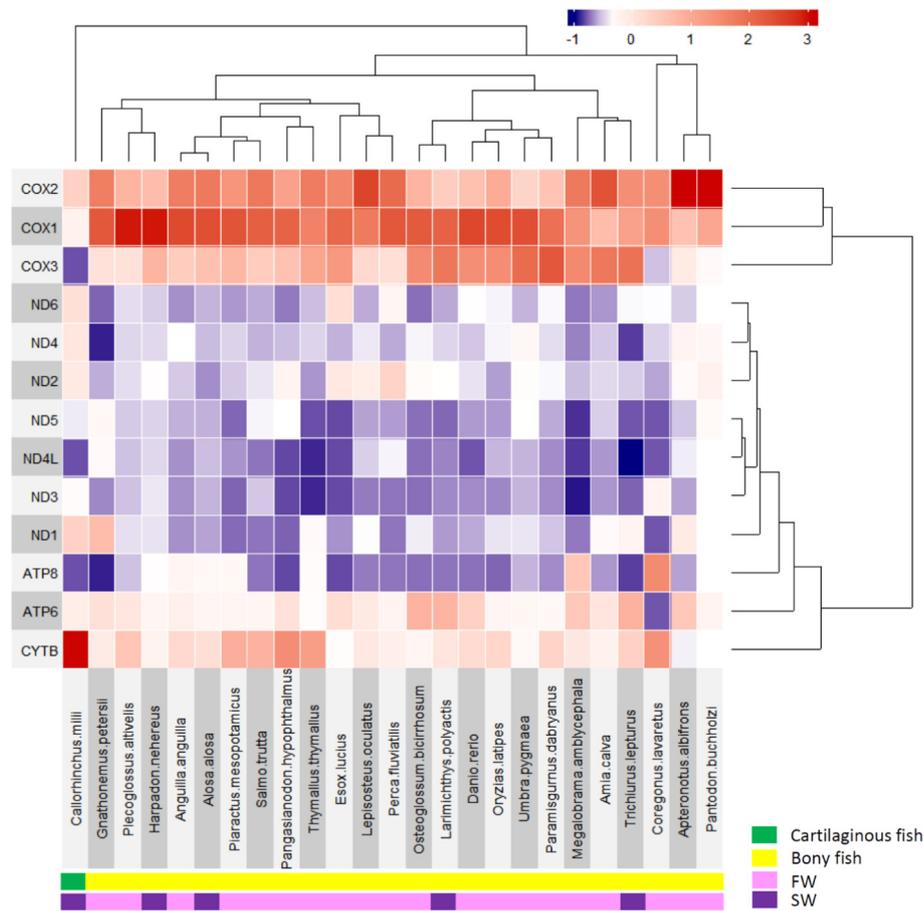


Fig. 4. Heatmap and a two-dimensional hierarchical clustering of 13 protein-coding genes (PCGs) in muscle tissues. The X-axis represents fish species and Y-axis represents 13 PCGs. The relative gene expression levels are presented as a heatmap with red color for high expression and blue color for low expression. In the bottom panel, four-color codes are used to show fish phylogenetic position (bony or cartilaginous fish) and living habitat (FW or SW). In this study, the Australian ghost shark (*Callorhynchus milii*) belonging to the subclass Holocephali (chimaera) is the only cartilaginous fish (Chondrichthyes) used in this study. FW indicates freshwater and SW indicates seawater.

amphibian, bird, and mammals were compared? With the great progress on transcriptomic data deposited to the NCBI SRA database, we believed more animal muscle transcriptomic data would be available in the coming future for scientists to validate this hypothesis in the coming future.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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