Transient and Big Are Key Features of an Invertebrate T-type Channel \( (L_{Ca,3}) \) from the Central Nervous System of \( Lymnaea stagnalis \)*

Adriano Senatore and J. David Spafford

From the Department of Biology, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1, Canada

Here we describe features of the first non-mammalian T-type calcium channel \( (L_{Ca,3}) \) expressed in vitro. This molluscan channel possesses combined biophysical properties that are reminiscent of all mammalian T-type channels. It exhibits T-type features such as “transient” kinetics, but the “tiny” label, usually associated with \( Ba^{2+} \) conductance, is hard to reconcile with the “bigness” of this channel in many respects. \( L_{Ca,3} \) is 25% larger than any voltage-gated ion channel expressed to date. It codes for a massive, 322-kDa protein that conducts large macroscopic currents \( in vitro \). \( L_{Ca,3} \) is also the most abundant \( Ca^{2+} \) channel transcript in the snail nervous system. A window current at typical resting potentials appears to be at least as large as that reported for mammalian channels. This distant gene provides a unique perspective to analyze the structural, functional, drug binding, and evolutionary aspects of T-type channels.

T-type calcium channels open in response to slight depolarizations in the low voltage range. Paradoxically, they are also recruited after membrane hyperpolarization as occurs during rebound burst firing (1). A window current of T-type channels is a feature that permits \( Ca^{2+} \) entry at rest (2) and contributes to differentiation and growth promoting functions in both excitable and non-excitable cells (3). T-type channels are also a leading pharmaceutical drug target and are implicated in a wide range of conditions such as epilepsy, pain, hypertension, cancer, and mental disorders (4).

T-type \( Ca^{2+} \) currents were first measured in starfish eggs using a two-electrode voltage clamp (5). Currents conducted by “Channel I” were evoked by small depolarizations (low voltage-activated), visible as a small hump in a current amplitude \( versus \) test potential plot, appearing inconsequential beside the Channel II currents elicited by larger depolarizations (high voltage-activated). \( Ca^{2+} \) channel types would be discriminated further by Tsien and co-workers (6) on the basis of properties where \( Ba^{2+} \) is the charge carrier. High voltage-activated L-type channels have a large unitary \( Ba^{2+} \) conductance with long-lasting openings, N-type (or non-L-type) channels are typically associated with neurons of intermediate unitary conductance, and the low voltage-activated, T-type channels produce transient currents that are of tiny unitary conductance in \( Ba^{2+} \) and close slowly upon membrane repolarization, producing a slowly deactivating tail current (6).

T-type channels remain as the least understood among the \( Ca^{2+} \) channel families. Although most of the 10 mammalian \( Ca^{2+} \) channel genes were characterized in the late 1980s, an additional decade was required for a description of the three T-type genes, \( Ca_{3.1} \) (\( \alpha 1G \)), \( Ca_{3.2} \) (\( \alpha 1H \)), and \( Ca_{3.3} \) (\( \alpha 1I \)) (7).

Cloning and Sequencing of \( L_{Ca,3} \)

**EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

Cloning and Sequencing of \( L_{Ca,3} \)—The complete open reading frame for \( L_{Ca,3} \) was determined from at least three independent, overlapping DNA fragments from the PCR screening of \( L. stagnalis \) central nervous system \( \lambda ZAP \) cDNA libraries to generate a consensus gene. The full-length...
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9031-bp cDNA transcript is available in DDBJ/EMBL/GenBank™ databases under accession no. AF484084 and replaced a previous partial coding sequence entry of 5991 bp. The final clone was assembled from four overlapping PCR with sticky ends (numbered by cDNA transcript positions), XhoI-SpeI (209–2865), SpeI-Sall (2812–4544), Sall-MluI (4503–6874), and MluI-BamHI (6850–8869). Silent mutations were created in a Kozak consensus sequence upstream of the start codon (209–211), an MluI site (6858–6863), and several hairpin structures thought to interfere with the site-directed mutagenesis reaction (5225–5285). The full-length LC₃₃ coding sequence was assembled between XhoI and BamHI sites in bicistronic vector pIRE2-EGFP® (Clontech). Low frequency of positive recombinants during cloning and the slow rate of growth of the full-length plasmid in bacteria (five full days before a colony appears on a bacterial plate after transformation) suggest that the plasmid insert is toxic to bacteria.

Transfections—HEK-293T cells (M. Calos, Stanford University) were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium (Sigma) with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma) and supplemented with 0.5% (v/v) penicillin-streptomycin solution (Sigma). For electrophysiology, 6 mg/ml bovine serum albumin (BSA) was added to the above solution, and the medium was supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma) and antibiotics. These cells were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium (Sigma) supplemented with 0.5% (v/v) penicillin-streptomycin solution (Sigma). For electrophysiology, 6 mg/ml bovine serum albumin (BSA) was added to the above solution, and the medium was supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma) and antibiotics. These cells were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium (Sigma) supplemented with 0.5% (v/v) penicillin-streptomycin solution (Sigma). For electrophysiology, 6 mg/ml bovine serum albumin (BSA) was added to the above solution, and the medium was supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma) and antibiotics. These cells were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium (Sigma) supplemented with 0.5% (v/v) penicillin-streptomycin solution (Sigma). For electrophysiology, 6 mg/ml bovine serum albumin (BSA) was added to the above solution, and the medium was supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma) and antibiotics. These cells were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium (Sigma) supplemented with 0.5% (v/v) penicillin-streptomycin solution (Sigma). For electrophysiology, 6 mg/ml bovine serum albumin (BSA) was added to the above solution, and the medium was supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma) and antibiotics.

Whole Cell Patch Clamp Recordings—Whole-cell recordings were carried out at 23 °C using either a 5 mM external Ca²⁺ solution (5 mM CaCl₂, 166 mM tetraethylammonium chloride, 10 mM HEPES, pH 7.4) or 5 mM external Ba²⁺ solution (5 mM BaCl₂, 166 mM tetraethylammonium chloride, 10 mM HEPES pH 7.4) and an internal solution consisting of 125 mM CsCl, 10 mM EGTA, 2 mM CaCl₂, 1 mM MgCl₂, 4 mM MgATP, 0.3 mM Tris-GTP, and 10 mM HEPES, pH 7.2. Recordings were obtained using an Axopatch 200B amplifier, sampled to a PC through a Digidata 1440A A/D converter. Data were filtered at 2 kHz and digitized at 5 kHz and acquired using pCLAMP 10.1 software (Molecular Devices). The pipette resistance was maintained between 3 and 5 megohms, and the typical access resistance was between 4 and 5 megohms. Only recordings with minimal leak (<10%) and small current sizes (<2 nA) were used for analysis, and offline leak subtraction was carried out using the Clampfit 10.1 software (Molecular Devices). Series resistance was compensated to 70% (prediction and correction; 10-µs lag). A gravity flow system was used to perfuse 5 mM Ca²⁺- or Ba²⁺-containing extracellular solution or 5 mM Ca²⁺ external solution containing solubilized Ni²⁺ (Sigma) or mibefradil (Sigma).

Data Analysis—Ca²⁺ current activation curves were constructed by converting the peak current values from each current-voltage relationship data set to conductance using the equation: gCa = Ipeak/(Vcommand - ECa), where Ipeak is the peak current, Vcommand is the command pulse potential, gCa is the calcium conductance, and ECa is the Ca²⁺ reversal potential as determined by linear extrapolation of the current values in the ascending portion of the current-voltage relationships. Conductance values were then normalized and individually fitted with the Boltzmann equation, g/gmax = (1 + (exp(-Vcommand - V1/2)/k)) - 1, where g is the peak conductance, gmax is the maximal peak Ca²⁺ conductance, Vcommand is the conditioning potential, V1/2 is the half-maximal activation, and k is the activation slope factor. The steady-state inactivation curves were constructed by plotting normalized current (peak test pulse current/peak prepulse current) as a function of the inactivating potential. The data were fitted with a Boltzmann equation, I/Imax = (1 + exp((V - V1/2)/k)) - 1, where I is the peak test pulse current, Imax is the peak test pulse current when the conditioning pulse was -110 mV, V1/2 and k are the conditioning potential and the half-maximal inactivation, respectively, and k is the inactivation slope factor. Kinetics of activation, inactivation, and deactivation were determined by fitting monoexponential functions over the growing or decaying phases of each current trace using the software Clampfit 10.1.

Antibody Production—LC₃₃ I-I linker coding sequence (1976–2575 bp) was PCR-amplified and cloned into the bacterial protein expression vector pET-22b(+) (Novagen) via Ndel and Xhol restriction sites. Peptide expression was induced by 1 mM isopropyl 1-thio-d-galactopyranoside in Rosetta™ (DE3) cells (Novagen) transformed with the pET22b(+) plasmid-containing construct. Supernatant of lysed bacterial cells containing His₆ LC₃₃ I-I linker expression was run and washed through a column containing Ni²⁺-charged His-Bind® resin (Novagen), then eluted off of the beads, dialyzed, and quantified using the Bradford assay. A rabbit was injected three times with recombinant proteins emulsified with Freund’s complete adjuvant for the first injection and Freund’s incomplete adjuvant (Sigma) for the subsequent injections. IgG rabbit antisera was tested for immune reactivity with the antigen by Western blotting.

Immunolabeling of Recombinant LC₃₃ in HEK-293T Cells—HEK-293T cells were transfected with either 8 µg of LC₃₃ in pIRE2-EGFP alone or with 3.2 µg of LC₃₃ a0 subunit in pIRE2-EGFP (9) plus 2.4 µg of the rat β1 subunit in pMT2 and 2.4 µg of rat α₁,δ subunit in pMT2. Cells were washed after transfection and incubated at 28 °C for 1 week before trypsinization and plating onto glass coverslips. Cells were then fixed with 1% paraformaldehyde in PBS overnight at 4 °C, washed twice with PBS, then permeabilized using phosphate-buffered saline containing 0.2% Tween 20 (PBS-T) for 10 min at room temperature. 1:500 primary antibody or preimmune serum was applied to preblocked cells overnight in PBS-T containing 3% bovine serum albumin. 3×-washed cells were incubated with 1:1000 diluted AlexaFluor 594 goat anti-rabbit secondary antibody in PBS-T containing 3% bovine serum albumin. 3×-washed AlexaFluor 594 goat anti-rabbit secondary antibody in PBS-T containing 3% bovine serum albumin. Images were captured using a Zeiss AxioObserver Z1 inverted epifluorescent microscope to detect AlexaFluor 594 antibody and EGFP. Images were captured.

The abbreviations used are: EGFP, enhanced green fluorescence protein; PBS, phosphate-buffered saline; RT, reverse transcription.
using Zeiss AxioVision software, an brightness/contrast was adjusted using Adobe Photoshop.

**Southern Blot**—15-μg aliquots of genomic DNA isolated from *Lymnaea* tissue were digested with EcoRV, HindIII, EcoRI, and XhoI, and DNA fragments were separated through a 1% agarose gel. Digested DNA was transferred onto a positively charged nylon membrane (Roche Applied Science), and a standard hybridization procedure was carried out using manufacturer’s instructions (EasyHyb, Roche Applied Science). Membranes were probed with a gel-purified 597-bp PCR product of the *LCav3* gene (incorporated with DIG-11-dUTP (Roche Applied Science)). The probe was localized on the membrane using anti-digoxigenin alkaline phosphatase-conjugated antibody (Roche Applied Science; 1:5000 dilution) and color substrate solution nitro blue tetrazolium/5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate (Roche Applied Science).

**Semiquantitative RT-PCR**—RNA was extracted from the central nervous system of *L. stagnalis* using Tri Reagent (Sigma) and optimized from standard methods (10). RNA was treated with DNase (Fermentas) to remove contaminant DNA for RT-PCR analysis. RNA was quantified by spectrophotometry and visualized by gel electrophoresis to confirm the lack of degradation. First-strand cDNA were synthesized from RNA at 54 °C for 80 min and 70 °C for 15 min using either oligo-dT or random hexamer primers and Superscript III reverse transcriptase (Invitrogen) and controls were prepared that lacked reverse transcriptase. Primers used for cDNA amplification were designed to have similar melting temperatures, minimal secondary structure, and amplified fragments of similar sizes (500–600 bp). PCR products generated after 25 cycles in the thermocycler were imaged in ethidium bromide-stained gels using a gel documentation system (Alpha Innotech) under UV light. Densinometric analysis of DNA band intensity was performed using Automatic Image Capture software (Alpha Innotech).

**FIGURE 1.** **Full-length snail LCa3 is the largest identified voltage-gated ion channel expressed to date.** It is coded by a 2886-amino acid protein with a molecular mass of 322 kDa. A, the N terminus closely matches with a putative start site derived from marine snail *A. californica* EST (EB302921) and slightly resembles the N and C termini of human Ca3.1–3.3. B, LCa3 is 1.25 larger than human Ca3 channels and 1.5 larger than nematode T-type, cca-1B, and all other four repeat ion channels. C, LCa3 is larger than human Ca3 channels in the N and C terminus and also the I-II and II-III cytoplasmic linkers.
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Results

Identity of an Invertebrate T-type Channel (LCav3)—A novel invertebrate T-type channel transcript (9031 bp) was assembled from cDNA derived from the central nervous system of the freshwater pond snail, *L. stagnalis*, with a coding region that starts as an almost perfect match to an Expressed Sequence Tag (EST) database entry from the marine snail *Aplysia californica* (accession no. EB302921). The LCav3 open reading frame predicts a 2886-amino acid protein, with an estimated ~322-kDa molecular mass. The start and end of the LCav3 amino acid sequence also resemble those of the human Ca$_3$ channel (Fig. 1A). Consistent with other cation channels of this type, LCav3 has four repeat domains (DI to DIV) with each domain containing six membrane-spanning segments similar to the voltage-gated K channels (Fig. 3A). LCav3 is the largest voltage-gated ion channel expressed to date, being 25% larger than the mammalian T-types, 50% larger than a T-type homologue from *C. elegans* (Fig. 1A), and significantly larger than other Ca$_3$3 channels (Ca$_1$, Ca$_2$), sodium channels (Na$_x$), and NALCN (Fig. 1B). The extra size is mostly due to long cytoplasmic N and C termini and the cytoplasmic I-II and II-III linkers (Fig. 1C).

Snails, like most invertebrates, appear to have branched before the genomic duplication events that led to the expansion of gene isoforms and as such bear only single representatives for each of the three Ca$_3$3 channel families (Ca$_1$, Ca$_2$, and Ca$_3$) compared with the 10 different Ca$_3$3 channel genes in mammals (Fig. 2A). The snail T-type gene diverges dramatically in amino acid sequence from the mammalian genes (mean identity/similarity = 37.6/46.1%), whereas the mammalian homologues are clustered closer together (mean identity/similarity = 50.7/57.9%) (Fig. 2C). The single copy nature of the LCav3 gene in the genome is evidenced by Southern blotting, producing a single banding hybridization pattern, except for a gel lane where the restriction enzyme (EcoRV) cuts the genomic DNA within the probe sequence, leading to two bands of weaker intensity (lane a, Fig. 2B). The LCav3 transcript is more abundant than other Ca$_3$3 channels (LCav1 and LCav2) or NALCN in central nervous system tissue as measured by semiquantitative RT-PCR (Fig. 2D). The higher expression of LCav3 compared with these others was also found by single cell, quantitative real-time PCR of individual VD4 neurons in a previous study using different primer sets (see Spafford et al. (11) and Fig. 2).

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

**Fig. 2.** Singleton, snail T-type Ca$_3$3 channel gene is distantly related to vertebrate homologs and is the most abundant Ca$_3$3 channel transcript in the snail brain. A, shown is the most parsimonious gene tree generated using multiple aligned sequences, analyzed in PAUP4.0 (D. L. Swofford) and illustrated with TreeView (R. D. M. Page). Sequences include official human sequences (IUPHAR database); LCav3 (GenBank accession no. AF484084) and yeast gene Cch1 from Schizosaccharomyces pombe (GenBank accession no. CAB11726) and Saccharomyces cerevisiae (GenBank accession no. CA97244). Numbers at branch points represent bootstrap values based on 100 replicates in heuristic search. Phylogram branches are scaled by their length and rooted with Cch1 Ca$_3$3 channel homologs from fungi species. Percent amino acid similarity scores were generated from EMBOSS NEEDLE (EMBL). B, Southern blot indicates a single copy gene in the Lymnaea genome. A T-type probe hybridized to create a banding pattern (white arrows) on the blot was created from membrane transfer of genomic DNA digested with either EcoRV(a), HindIII(b), EcoRI(c), or Xhol(d). The probe contained an EcoRV restriction site, so the probe hybridized to two genomic DNA fragments digested with EcoRV. D, densitometric intensity of RT-PCR bands (illustrated in the inset) was generated from Lymnaea brain tissue.
core, a putative salt bridge, and potential protein-protein interaction sites facing away from the hydrophobic core (Fig. 3C). 4

Expression Characteristics of LCav3 in HEK-293T Cells—Transient transfection of LCav3 cDNA contained in pIRES2-EGFP vector reveals membrane-delimited staining of HEK-293T cells (box, Fig. 4A) with a rabbit polyclonal antibody generated against the I-II cytoplasmic linker of LCav3 (see Fig. 3A for the relative location of the epitope). Antibody staining was not apparent in LCav1-transfected cells (9) or when preimmune serum was used to detect LCav3 (Fig. 4A). Channel expression levels generally correspond to the EGFP intensity in HEK-293T cells, as would be expected with the LCav3 cDNA expressed on the same mRNA using the bicistronic expression vector, pIRES2-EGFP. The optimal level of HEK-293T expression for electrophysiological recording (200 pA to 1.5 nA) corresponds to 3 days after transfection, whereas larger currents of up to 10 nA were possible by allowing protein expression to continue for up to 6 days (Fig. 4B). Typical transient kinetics of T-type currents are revealed in whole cell recordings of LCav3. Small voltage steps above threshold (−70 to −65 mV) are slow to activate and inactivate (requiring 10s of ms). Larger voltage steps elicit currents with progressively faster activation and inactivation kinetics that cross over each other with each successive step toward a maximal current for a voltage step of −35 mV (Fig. 4C). τ of inactivation kinetics follows the change in the time to peak and τ of activation kinetics with increasing voltage steps (Fig. 4E) (see Table 1 for a detailed comparison of biophysical parameters between Cav3 channels). The pairing of activation and inactivation with LCav3 is typical of T-type currents and has led some to suggest that T-type channel inactivation is voltage-independent (12). The voltage sensitivity of LCav3 approximates a typical low threshold T-type current that peaks at −35 mV (Fig. 4d), although technically LCav3 is slightly lower threshold than mammalian T-types (peak between −30 and −25 mV). Channel availability at steady state was assessed after a 1-s prepulse protocol (Fig. 5A) and a 5-s prepulse protocol (data not shown), revealing a surprisingly steep and positively shifted availability curve compared with mammalian T-type channels (Fig. 5B). The combination of the very low threshold of channel activation and the

4 E. Perez-Reyes, personal communication.
large fraction of possible available channels creates a potentially large and persistent window current near the resting membrane potential of typical neurons (2) (Fig. 5C). An estimated window current was gathered by the product of available channels under steady-state conditions and the relative peak conductance. As many as 1.8% of total T-type channels may contribute to this current at \(-65\) mV (Fig. 5C), a value at least as high as that calculated for recombinant mammalian channels gathered under similar conditions. A measure of the persistent, steady-state current amplitude was assessed after 1 s of sustained potentials held from a range of \(-70\) to \(-50\) mV in 5-mV increments. The largest, persistent current corresponded to the estimated maximal window current size at resting membrane potentials of \(-65\) mV (Fig. 5c, inset).

One of the characteristic features of T-type channels is a slow rate of deactivation (7). Deactivation is measured as the rate of current decay from a tail current generated by the rapid return to lower, more hyperpolarized potentials with maximally opened channels (held at \(-35\) mV) (Fig. 6). Deactivation rates of LCav3 are fastest at hyperpolarized potentials (\(-110\) mV) and quickly slow with depolarization steps to resting potentials (\(-60\) mV) (Fig. 6). LCav3 fits within the faster end of the range of deactivation kinetics for mammalian T-type channels but is still manyfold slower than Ca1 and Ca2 channels. The slowness of deactivation kinetics suggests that native LCav3 currents may pass a deactivating tail current upon membrane repolarization.

Macroscopic, native Ca2+ currents are typically equal or larger than Ba2+ currents at equimolar concentrations, although the unitary conductance is reported to be equal in high Ca2+ or Ba2+ (13). Macroscopic Ca2+ currents range from smaller, equal, or larger than Ba2+ currents for recombinant Cav3.2, Cav3.3, or Cav3.1 channels, respectively (14). Reasons for the relative differences in Ca2+ and Ba2+ permeability of different channel types are not clearly understood. LCav3 resembles Ca3.2 and other high voltage-activated snail Ca2+ channels, conducting larger amplitude whole cell Ba2+ currents than Ca2+ currents (Fig. 7A) (7). Ba2+ as a charge carrier results in a slight hyperpolarizing shift in the current-voltage relationships compared with Ca2+ (Fig. 7B), but there is still an ~50% increase in whole cell Ba2+ conductance compared with Ca2+ in the absence of driving force changes (Fig. 7C). Kinetics are also faster when Ba2+ is the charge carrier, with faster time to
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TABLE 1
Comparison of biophysical parameters for recombinant LCav3 and mammalian T-type channels expressed in human cell lines

|                   | LCav3 | n  | Ca,3,1 | Reference | Ca,3,2 | Reference | Ca,3,3 | Reference |
|-------------------|-------|----|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|
| **Activation**    |       |    |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| $V_{1/2}$ (mV)   | -48.42 ± 0.34 | 5  | -44.6 ± 0.7a | 25, 49 | -42.7 ± 0.7b | 21, 24 | -40.2 ± 0.8b | 25 |
| $K$ (pA/pF)      | 5.81 ± 0.30  | 5  | 5.8 ± 0.2 | 25, 49 | 6.0 ± 0.1 | 21, 24 | 5.8 ± 0.2 | 25 |
| Peak of IV (mV)  | -35  | 5  | 35  | 25, 49 | 6.3 ± 0.1 | 21, 24 | -30  | 21 | -25 |
| **Inactivation** |       |    |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| $V_{1/2}$ (mV)   | -65.40 ± 0.15 | 7  | -77.7 ± 0.7a | 25, 49 | -77.7 ± 0.8b | 21, 24 | -68.6 ± 0.7b | 25 |
| $K$ (pA/pF)      | 2.76 ± 0.13  | 7  | -5.0 ± 0.2b | 25 | -5.7 ± 0.2a | 21, 24 | -5.5 ± 0.5a | 25 |
| **Kinetics at ~20 mV** |       |    |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| $\tau_{act}$ (ms) | 2.34 ± 0.12 | 5  | 1.6 ± 0.2a | 49 | 2.9 ± 0.1a | 24 | NA |
| $\tau_{inact}$ (ms) | 17.11 ± 0.46 | 5  | 13.9 ± 1.1a | 49 | 17.4 ± 0.9 | 24 | NA |
| **Kinetics at ~30 mV** |       |    |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| $\tau_{act}$ (ms) | 3.19 ± 0.17 | 5  | 2.9 ± 0.4 | 50 | 3.8 ± 0.1a | 50 | 14 ± 1.0b | 50 |
| $\tau_{inact}$ (ms) | 19.16 ± 0.57 | 5  | 17 ± 6 | 50 | 16 ± 1 | 50 | 80 ± 5a | 50 |
| **Deactivation** |       |    |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| $100$ mV         | 1.03 ± 0.15 | 10 | 2.6 ± 0.2bc | 28 | 3.6 ± 0.4bc | 28 | 1.12 ± 0.1c | 28 |
| $70$ mV          | 2.91 ± 0.64 | 10 | 6.2 ± 0.4bc | 28 | 8.5 ± 1.1bc | 28 | 2.1 ± 0.1bc | 28 |
| **Pharmacology** |       |    |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| Nickel (IC$_{50}$, µM) | 300.00 ± 29.24 | 4  | 250 ± 22d | 15, 16 | 4.9 ± 2.0bd | 15, 16 | 216 ± 9ed | 15 |
| Mibefradil (IC$_{50}$, µM) | 0.68 ± 0.03 | 4  | 1.2 ± 0.2d | 19 | 1.1 ± 0.2a | 9  | 1.5 ± 0.1bd | 19 |

$a$ $p < 0.05$ (one-way analysis of variance).
$b$ $p < 0.005$ (one-way analysis of variance).
$c$ 2 mM instead of 5 mM Ca$^{2+}$ in extracellular solution.
$d$ 10 mM Ba$^{2+}$ in extracellular solution.

Peak (Fig. 7D) associated with more rapid inactivation kinetics (Fig. 7E). Ca$^{2+}$-dependent inactivation typically associated with Ca$_{1}$ channels is not a property of LCav3 or other T-type channels (14).

Ni$^{2+}$ traditionally has been considered to be a blocker that distinguishes T-types from other channels, but only one of the three cloned mammalian T-channels, Ca$_{3,2}$, is strongly inhibited by Ni$^{2+}$ (15). LCav3 is approximately equally sensitive to Ni$^{2+}$ as Ca$_{3,1}$ and Ca$_{3,3}$, with an IC$_{50}$ value of 300 ± 29.24 µM (Fig. 8A), but all of these T-type channels are ~20–60-fold less sensitive than Ca$_{3,2}$ (15). Lee and co-workers (16) identified that the unusual Ni$^{2+}$ sensitivity of Ca$_{3,2}$ critically involves His-191, imbedded in a helix-turn-helix motif known as the S3b-S4 voltage sensor paddle in Domain I (17) (Fig. 8C). Interestingly, LCav3 does not have a corresponding His-191 residue of Ca$_{3,2}$, but neither does the sequence of the S3b-S4 voltage sensor paddle of LCav3 compare well with any of the Ca$_{3}$ channels (Fig. 8C). LCav3 has an eight-amino acid insert in this short linker region and extra positive and negative charges compared with the mammalian Ca$_{3}$ channels (Fig. 8C). The Ni$^{2+}$ dose-response curve does not perfectly fit the data (Fig. 8B), but a biphasic dose-response curve does, having a high affinity IC$_{50}$ of 27.25 ± 2.74 µM (38%) and a lower affinity IC$_{50}$ of 1064.54 ± 79.11 µM (62%) (Fig. 8B, inset).

Mibefradil was marketed by Roche Applied Science as a drug for treatment of hypertension and angina (18) before it was withdrawn in 1998 for its potential side effects. It is a non-selective antagonist but typically has an ~10-fold greater selectivity for T-type channels over L-type Ca$_{2}^{2+}$ channels. LCav3 is in the range of sensitivity to mibefradil (680 ± 0.03 nM) as mammalian T-type channels (Fig. 8D). Caution must be heeded when directly comparing results from different studies as mibefradil is highly sensitive to the charge carrier, charge carrier concentration, and holding potential (19).

DISCUSSION

Introduction to LCav3—Here we describe the first in vitro expression characteristics of a snail homolog of mammalian T-type channels and, also remarkable, is that LCav3 is only one of two full-length cDNA sequences determined for non-mammalian T-types to date. cDNAs are assembled from predicted exons from a number of invertebrate sequenced genomes (e.g. Drosophila melanogaster Ca-$\alpha$1T-RB, accession no. NM_132068), but low homology outside of the conserved transmembrane domains indicates that the predicted transcript assemblies are likely erroneous when analyzed with multiple sequence alignments of cDNAs derived from mRNA (LCav3 and C. elegans cca-1B, human Ca$_{3,1}$ to Ca$_{3,3}$). LCav3 codes for a 322-kDa protein of 2886 amino acids, which is the largest protein of any reported four-repeat ion channel family. The transmembrane regions are not responsible for most of the extra mass of LCav3 and include the highly conserved, voltage-sensor domain (S1 to S4) the outer helix (S5), the P-loop, and inner helix (S6) in all four repeat domains (7). A unique DDEE selectivity filter (20) and a gating brake (21) are two trademarks of T-types that distinguish them from the Ca$_{1}$ and Ca$_{2}$Ca$_{2}^{2+}$ channel families. Flexible side chains of each domain harboring key glutamate residues (EEEE) contribute to the selectivity filter by extending...
into the permeation pathway, where they are expected to bridge Ca\(^{2+}\)/H\(^{+}\) ions as they pass through the pore of high voltage-activated Cav1 and Cav2 channels. A highly conserved aspartate residue upstream in the selectivity filter and adjacent to the glutamate residue in Domain II may serve to attract incoming Ca\(^{2+}\)/H\(^{+}\) ions to the ion-selective pore of all Ca\(^{2+}\)/H\(^{+}\) channels, according to modeling studies by B. Zhorov. T-type channels are reported to have a lower Ca\(^{2+}\)/H\(^{+}\) selectivity over monovalent cations as the estimated reversal potential is less positive than high voltage-activated Cav1 and Cav2 channels (40 versus 60 mV) (22). Shortened carbon side chains in Domains I and II of T-types (DDEE instead of EEEE) may bridge Ca\(^{2+}\)/H\(^{+}\) ions less stringently, resulting in lower pore selectivity for Ca\(^{2+}\) ions in favor of faster kinetics that is typical for T-type Ca\(^{2+}\) channels. Interestingly, inactivation kinetic changes mirror changes in activation kinetics in T-types (12), and a modified EEDD locus alters gating properties (20).

No obvious conclusion can be drawn from differences in permeability for Ba\(^{2+}\) and Ca\(^{2+}\) ions among T-type channels. Only LCa\(^{3}\) and mammalian Ca\(^{3.2}\) channels have larger macroscopic Ba\(^{2+}\) than Ca\(^{2+}\) currents. Interestingly, greater macroscopic currents in Ba\(^{2+}\) over Ca\(^{2+}\) are a consistent feature with snail Ca\(^{2+}\) channels expressed in HEK-293T cells including LCa\(^{1}\) (9) and LCa\(^{2}\) (23).

**Gating Brake**—A gating brake shared among T-type channels is considered to prevent channel opening at hyperpolarized potentials, as nucleotide polymorphisms in patients with childhood absence epilepsy or strategically placed deletions in this region produce channels that open at even more negative potentials than typical T-type channels (24). The proximal I-II loop of LCa\(^{3}\) is predicted to contain the helix-loop-helix gating brake structure (21), and more distally the I-II loop has been ascribed to regulating the surface expression of T-types (25). It may be more than coincidence that the gating brake is in the equivalent position where \(\beta\) subunits associate with and alter the biophysical properties of high voltage-activated Cav1 and Cav2 channels as well as regulate/modulate their expression (e.g. protein folding, turnover, and membrane trafficking) (26). Indeed, invertebrate LCa\(^{3}\) does not require accessory \(\beta\) or \(\alpha\beta\) subunits and robustly expresses in human HEK-293T cells at
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FIGURE 7. LCa3 currents are larger and faster when Ba2+ is the charge carrier. Sample traces (A) and current-voltage relationships (B) of LCa3 currents were generated from depolarizing voltage steps from a holding potential of −110 mV while microperfusing extracellular solution containing either 5 mM Ba2+ or 5 mM Ca2+. Whole cell Ba2+ conductance was estimated to be 50% greater than Ca2+ conductance at all voltages (C). Kinetics of activation (time to peak current, ms) (D) and inactivation decay (tau curve fit, ms) (E) are faster when barium instead of calcium is the charge carrier.

an efficiency that rivals the mammalian T-type channels. Continued transfection in the presence of G418 antibiotic selection has generated a number of stable HEK-293T cell lines for LCa3. A high constitutive expression of LCa3 under the strong mammalian cytomegalovirus promoter argues in favor of greater transcriptional controls for T-type channel expression in native cells compared with perhaps more post-translational checkpoints regulating the expression of Ca1,2 and Ca2,2 channels that are known to form complex, multimeric assemblies along the secretory pathway.

Overall Shared Features of T-type Channels—Scoring of the overall amino acid conservation between invertebrate and mammalian genes can lead to overestimates of the degree of structural divergence, as a sequence not under selection will drift substantially over the hundreds of millions of years separating their evolution. Comparing the in vitro expression characteristics between LCa3 and mammalian T-types suggests a structural equivalency in core regions despite the overall sequence divergence of different channels, revealing a set of quintessential properties shared by all T-types. Voltage properties are tightly regulated with fast and transient kinetics, slow deactivation, window currents produced by overlapping activation, and availability curves and channel activity limited to a narrow window of subthreshold voltages where channels are available and conducting. Also, similar drug sensitivities of LCa3 for Ni2+ ions and mibefradil suggest conserved residues in the outer pore and the aqueous permeation pathway between the selectivity filter and the aqueous, pore-lined, inner S6 helices (inverted tepee-shape) as predicted from the three-dimensional structure of crystallized K channels (27). Probing the affinity of a number of different T-type channel drugs will assist in interpreting the structural variants in the snail channel pore versus the mammalian ones.

Primitive Features in Invertebrate Channels—Invertebrate Ca2+ channels of the high voltage variety are also highly conserved in their biophysical properties. Rat Ca1,2 and snail LCa,1 channels, for example, are so alike that there are no reliable biophysical features outside of drug sensitivity that separate the two channels transfected in HEK-293T cells.5 Differences outside of biophysical features appear to reflect the primitiveness of the invertebrate homologue, reminiscent of a state preceding the evolution of specializations in electromechanical coupling, such as the tetrad organization in skeletal muscle where mammalian Ca1,1 channels are directly coupled to ryanodine receptors of the sarcoplasmic reticulum (29). Invertebrate muscles lack tetrads or an equivalent Ca1,1 channel that mediates muscle contraction (29). More indirect coupling, with Ca2+ serving as a short range transmitter, is also a feature of invertebrate neurotransmission. Invertebrate Ca2,2 channels that are responsible for transmitter release lack a II-III loop structure containing the synaptic protein binding site of Ca2,1 and Ca2,2 channels (11) and also exhibit a synaptic organization lacking key structural proteins present in mammalian synapses (such as Bassoon and CAST) and a synaptic substructure, such as a Drosophila T-bar, which is unlike the mammalian presynaptic density (30).

T-type Channel Diversity—T-type channels are modulated through intracellular signaling cascades and are coupled to other ion channels (31), but there is little to indicate that T-types serve as instruments for electromechanical coupling in cell-type specific, multisubunit complexes in the manner of Ca1 and Ca2,2 channels (32). Structural diversity in the three mammalian T-type channels arose out of genomic duplication, perhaps creating some overlapping redundancy in function. Yet the presence of unique biophysical properties, tissue specificity, modulation, and putative protein-protein interactions sites suggests otherwise, indicating that the different genes may provide specialized functions in mammals. Examples that illustrate this functional divergence include the contribution to rebound burst firing in thalamocortical neurons by Ca3,1, the involvement of Ca3,2 in pain sensitivity, relaxation of coronary arteries and secretion of aldosterone, and the involvement of Ca3,3 in long-lasting bursts in the inferior olive and habenula served by its slower kinetics and a larger window current range compared with other T-type channels (7). Distinct, regional antibody staining within individual central neurons suggests that each gene may serve particular roles within somatic, dendritic, and perinuclear compartments (33, 34). Whether the diversity

5 A. Senatore, S. Lam, A. N. Boone, T. F. Dawson, B. S. Zhorov, and J. D. Spafford, manuscript in preparation.
of mechanisms in mammals is contained within a single invertebrate Ca₃ gene and its alternative splicing has not been explored.

**Wide Range of Functions Expected for Abundant T-type Channel Transcript**—Here we show that LCav₃ is the most abundant Ca²⁺/H⁺ channel transcript in the Lymnaea nervous system, and our previous analysis indicates that this reflects a transcript profile in an individual snail neuron (11). Quantitative RT-PCR of single identified respiratory VD₄ neurons, measured in replicates of six neurons, indicated that LCav₃ is manyfold more abundant than either LCav₁ or LCav₂ channel expression (11). Their abundance in invertebrates may reflect a wide range of functions associated with T-type channels such as (a) shaping nerve action potentials and pacemaking, (b) a non-electrogenic role for T-types in providing Ca²⁺/H⁺ through window currents (2), and (c) roles in differentiating and proliferating cells (3) and (d) secretion (35). Some invertebrates also appear to have additional roles that are not served by mammalian T-type channels, such as excitation contraction coupling in jellyfish muscle cells (36) or facilitating the contraction of pharyngeal muscles in nematodes (37). Interestingly, T-type spikes can provide qualitatively different information than sodium spikes in the same invertebrate axons. Weak depolarizations initiate slow swimming via T-type spikes, whereas stronger pacemaking inputs initiate a fast escape swimming response mediated by overshooting sodium spikes in the same axons, presumably operating in the availability range outside of T-type channels (38).

**Drug Binding; Nickel**—LCav₃ has equal (holding potential) Ni²⁺ sensitivity as Cav₃.1 and Cav₃.3 channels. We report that the Ni²⁺ dose-response curve for LCav₃ is biphasic, indicative of two components of drug block. A similar biphasic Ni²⁺ block is apparent in the dose-response data for mammalian recombinant channels (Fig. 3D in Ref. 16, Fig. 2B in Ref. 15, and Fig. 7B in Ref. 39) and in native currents (Fig. 3A in Ref. 40, Fig. 6B in Ref. 41, and Fig. 7B in Ref. 39). A biphasic response might result from two Ni²⁺ binding sites. Jones and co-workers suggest that Cav₃.1 indeed has two binding sites, one in the outer pore and another deeper site within the pore pathway that is strongly affected by the permeant ion (42).

Unusually sensitive Ni²⁺ block (5–10 μM IC₅₀) is a property of Ca₃.2 channels and critically involves a His-191 residue (16) in what has been described as the S3b-S4 voltage sensor paddle based on the x-ray structure of potassium channels (43). More than His-191 may be critical in the S3b-S4 voltage sensor paddle as a similar high affinity cation block of
Ca$_{3.2}$ channels by extracellular Zn$^{2+}$ involves the His-191 residue and two residues directly upstream of His-191, in particular, Asp-189 and Gly-190 (44).

The S3b-S4 is considered to carry most of the gating charge and likely drives the conformational changes required for pore opening and closing. It seems probable that Ni$^{2+}$ associates with the S3b-S4 paddle motif of Ca$_{3.2}$ in a manner similar to how tarantula and scorpion toxins immobilize the voltage sensor of sodium channels (17). Ca$_{3.2}$ is inhibited by Ni$^{2+}$ independently of voltage and is similarly blocked with Ca$^{2+}$ or Ba$^{2+}$ as a charge carrier, which is consistent with an inhibition by a mechanism outside the permeation pathway (42). Interestingly, LC$_{3.3}$ has an eight-amino acid insert in this short S3b-S4 region with extra positive and negative charges compared with Ca$_{3.3}$ channels. The effect of the insert on Ni$^{2+}$ block or voltage-gating, if any, is not known.

Other regions may also contribute to Ni$^{2+}$ block. High affinity Zn$^{2+}$ block in Cav3.2 channels also involves a neutral Ala-140 in IS2 that is negatively charged (Asp-140) in corresponding position of less sensitive Cav3.1 and Cav3.3 channels (44). Future chimera work may be important to evaluate whether LC$_{3.3}$ with a positively charged His-140 at this position influences cation block.

Drug Binding: Mibefradil—A number of new and potent T-type channel blockers are being explored, and mibefradil serves as the first T-type channel blocker that was clinically available (18). Interestingly, mibefradil block of snail LC$_{3.3}$ channel is in the range of potency of mammalian T-types. With doses spanning the mid-range of the IC$_{50}$ (680 ± 0.03 nm), we observed that the mibefradil block of LC$_{3.3}$ would not readily stabilize, with accumulation of a slow but progressive block during long periods (tens of min) of continuous perfusion. We assume that this reflects a use-dependence often ascribed to mibefradil block (45). A slow time course of mibefradil block may also be explained by a reported accumulation of a hydrolyzed metabolite and more membrane-impermeant form of mibefradil (dm-mibefradil) that has an affinity for calcium channels from the cytoplasm (46). Further probing of different structures with mammalian and snail homologs will provide an opportunity for describing the high affinity drug binding in T-type channels.

Summary and Future Prospects—Expression characteristics of an invertebrate T-type channel has combined features that are reminiscent of all mammalian Ca$_{3.1}$, Ca$_{3.2}$, and Ca$_{3.3}$ channels (see Table 1). LC$_{3.3}$ is 25% larger than any voltage-gated ion channel expressed to date and is the most abundantly expressed Ca$^{2+}$ channel transcript in the snail nervous system. Window currents in invertebrate and mammalian T-type channels suggest a likely non-electrogenic role for T-types in providing Ca$^{2+}$ for proliferating and differentiating cells and in the developing embryo. Alternative splicing of the single invertebrate gene may provide the structural diversity for shaping the window current and firing patterns catered for individual network requirements. We anticipate that the snail will provide unique perspectives for probing T-type channel physiology. Much can be learned from the simple molluscan preparation where only a single T-type channel gene is expressed in native cells and where there is relative ease in probing the physiologic mechanisms in single identified cultured neurons and intact networks in the brain that underlay well described behaviors (47). An invertebrate channel also provides an opportunity to reflect on evolutionary mechanisms. Channel I as it was first described has turned out to be the most challenging Ca$^{2+}$ channel to analyze since it was identified by Hagiwara et al. (5) more than 35 years ago. There is some truth in the following summary statement by Gray and Macdonald (48), reflecting on the present status of the T-type channel field: “[The] Physiologic regulation of T-type channels is simultaneously well documented and very obscure.”

Acknowledgments—We thank E. Perez-Reyes and B. Zhvorov for helpful discussions, H. Vigil-Guitierrez for assistance in generating LC$_{3.3}$ antibodies, S. Lam for support in setting up the electrophysiological experiments, and A. N. Boone for editing the manuscript.

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