Cooperativity between the J and S Elements of Class II Major Histocompatibility Complex Genes As Enhancers in Normal and Class II-negative Patient and Mutant B Cell Lines

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Summary

The class II major histocompatibility complex genes all contain in their proximal promoters three cis-elements called S, X, and Y that are conserved in both sequence and position, and a fourth element, J, conserved in sequence but not in position. J, X, and Y and, to some extent, S, have been shown to be functionally important in regulation of expression of these genes. In the present study, a protein factor that binds cooperatively to the S plus J elements of the promoter of the class II major histocompatibility complex gene DPA has been detected. Moreover, functional cooperativity between S and J in activation of the enhancerless –40 interferon-β (–40 IFN-β) promoter has been demonstrated. Finally, the latter assay appears to subdivide complementation group A of class II negative human B cell lines that includes both mutants generated in vitro and cells from patients with the bare lymphocyte syndrome (type II). In three of these cell lines, the enhancerless –40 IFN-β promoter containing the S plus J elements was functionally active, while in the others it was inactive.

The human class II MHC genes play an essential role in class II MHC-restricted presentation of peptide antigens for generation of an antibody response and in some cases also for a class II MHC-restricted CTL response (Th1 cells) (1, 2). The regulation of class II protein cell surface expression is, therefore, an important first step in control of the initiation, character, and magnitude of an immune response. Inappropriate expression may lead to autoimmune disease, or alternatively, decreased expression of class II may enable evasion of recognition by T cells.

Moreover, a disorder of class II MHC gene regulation, the class II bare lymphocyte syndrome (BLS), has been described (3–5). The disease is manifested by agammaglobulinemia, malabsorption, and T cell unresponsiveness to antigens and mitogens. The cell lines established from BLS patient’s PBL as well as several similar mutant B cell lines generated in vitro do not express any of the three subtypes of class II antigens (HLA-DR, -DQ, and -DP) (6, 7), with the exception of one unusual cell line that expresses only DQ (8). Southern blots have shown that all of the α and β chain genes encoding these glycoproteins in a subregion of the human MHC on chromosome 6 are intact in these mutant cell lines, but Northern blots revealed that they have little or no class II mRNA. Somatic cell hybridization of each of these mutant cell lines with normal human or mouse B cell lines results in stable hybrid cell lines which express the class II genes of the mutant cells (9–12). The defect, which behaves as an autosomal recessive trait, does not segregate with the MHC, suggesting that the syndrome is due to a defective or inactive trans-acting transcription factor (TAF) (3, 13). Analysis of transient heterokaryons produced by fusion of all available mutant cell lines in vitro showed that they fall into at least three and probably four different complementation groups (14–17). The class II MHC-negative mutant cell lines provide an important system for identifying genes controlling class II MHC gene expression. Recently, a gene for a factor, CIITA, defective in RJ2.2.5 cells, a member of complementation group A, was isolated by complementation cloning (18, 19). Transfection of this gene restored expression of all class II MHC isotypes in RJ2.2.5 cells. The factor, however, is not a DNA binding protein but may represent a coactivator of the X and Y boxes.

A set of conserved upstream sequence elements, termed S, X, and Y boxes, are found in the proximal promoters of all class II MHC genes. Functional roles for the X and Y boxes in the regulation of class II gene expression has been

1 Abbreviations used in this paper: BLS, bare lymphocyte syndrome; CAT, chloramphenicol acetyltransferase; EMSA, electrophoretic mobility shift assay; hGH, human growth hormone; pRSV, plasmid Rous sarcoma virus; TAF, trans-acting transcription factor.
demonstrated by mutational analysis using 5', 3', and gap deletion as well as site-directed and linker scanning mutagenesis, and a number of factors that bind to these elements have been described (6, 7). The function of the S element (20) is not well understood although it is thought to participate in MHC class II gene regulation in a position-dependent manner (21-23). However, constructs containing the X and Y elements alone are inactive in B cells and are not restored by the S element itself (24). Moreover, a fourth element, J, that does restore activity of these constructs has been described that is conserved in sequence but not in position (24-26). In the present study both nuclear protein binding to and functional enhancer activities of the S and J elements of the HLA-DPA gene have been examined. Cooperative interaction between the S and the J elements of DPA is an important feature in both assays. Moreover, these studies appear to subdivide complementation group A of class II-negative B cell lines.

Materials and Methods

Reagents. rIFN-γ (referred to throughout as IFN-γ) was generously provided by Biogen (Cambridge, MA). The human growth hormone (hGH) assay kit (Nichols Institute Diagnostics, San Juan Capistrano, CA) and oligonucleotides (Oligos etc. Inc., Guilford, CT) were purchased.

Cell Lines. Raji (ATCC CCL86) is a Burkitt's lymphoma B cell line that expresses high levels of all three class II isotypes of proteins. HeLa (CCL2; American Type Culture Collection, Rockville, MD) is a cervical carcinoma cell line. While resting HeLa cells do not express class II determinants, HLA-DR and -DP, but not -DQ, can be induced by IFN-γ (27). HPB-ALL is a human T cell tumor line that does not express class II proteins.

The Epstein-Barr virus–transformed B cell lines derived from class II−deficient patients have been described elsewhere (16); BCH, BLS-2, Ramia, Nacera, and TF, and the laboratory-generated mutants, RJ2.2.5, RM-2, RM-3, Clone 13, and 6.1.6, were used and grown as previously. All except Clone 13 lack DR, DQ, and DP. Clone 13, however, express DQ selectively, but not DR or DP (8).

Plasmids and Assays. The control plasmid pRSVCAT (Rous sarcoma virus long terminal repeat linked to the chloramphenicol acetyltransferase [CAT] gene), pTK CAT (TK promoter nucleotides -105 to +11 in pUC18 vector), and p40 IFN-β CAT (IFN-β promoter nucleotides -40 to +20 in pSP73 vector) have been described (28-30) and were the kind gift of T. Maniatis (Harvard University, Cambridge, MA). Oligonucleotides corresponding to the DPA and DQB sequences from positions -124 to -118 (S of DPA, 7 bp), -107 to -98 (J of DPA, 10 bp), -124 to -98 (S and J of DPA, 27 bp), -146 to -131 (J and S [or W] of DQB, 16 bp), were synthesized. Fragments corresponding to the minimum promoter region from positions -148 to -11 (DPA) or -160 to +39 (DQB) were purified after digestion with BamHI of the pDPA/148hGH plasmid and with HindIII of the pDQB/160CAT plasmid, respectively (24). These oligonucleotides and fragments were cloned into the BamHI site of the pUC18-CAT vector upstream of the TK promoter or into the BamHI site of the pSP73-CAT vector upstream of the -40 IFN-β promoter. Mutations in the S element, the J element, and the interspace region in the constructs containing the fragment -148 to -11 of the DPA promoter, and the S+J region of the DPA promoter in the -40 IFN-β CAT plasmid were made by PCR using the method of Giebel and Spritz (31). The 5' and the 3' primers corresponding to the sequences in the vector were 5'-TAATACGACTCACTATAGGG-3' and 5'-TTTCTTCTCCATTTAGCTCTCTC-3', respectively. The primers used for making mutations in the S element, the interspace region, and the J element in the -148 to -11 DPA promoter fragment containing plasmid were 5'-AGATCTCTCCACCATGGCAGTAC-3' and 5'-CCCGACACCCCTTTCAAGCTTCTCTTTAACCAGA-3', respectively. The primers used for making mutations in the S element, the interspace region, and the J element in the DPA S+J region containing plasmid were 5'-CTCTAGAGATCTCCCTCTCCCATTTACCCACGGAT-3' and 5'-GGGCTCTCTTTTTTCCACAGGAGGCC-3', respectively. The bold letters indicate the mutated bases.

Transfection of HeLa cell lines was performed by the calcium phosphate method as described (25, 26). Raji cells were transfected by electroporation in PBS plus 10 mM Hepes, pH 7.4 (24). Transfections also included 2 μg of pRSVhGH (33) as internal controls to normalize for small differences in transfection efficiencies (<15%). Approximately 48 h after transfection, the supernatant and cells were harvested by centrifugation and assayed for hGH activity and CAT activity essentially as described (33). For quantitative analysis a blot analyzer (Betascope 603; Betagen, Waltham, MA) was used (34).

Nuclear Extracts and Electrophoretic Mobility Shift Assays (EMSA). Nuclear extracts were prepared (35), from Raji, or confluent cultures of IFN-γ-treated and untreated HeLa cells using ~106 cells. Protein concentration was measured using the Bradford protein assay (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Hercules, CA). The sequence of oligonucleotides used in the gel shift (only sense strand shown) experiments are 5'-GATCCCCGCACTTGG, S element of DPA; 5'-GATCCTTACACCCAGG-3', J element of DPA; 5'-GATCCGGCGCTTCGTCTTTACCCAGG-3', S+J elements of DPA; and 5'-GATCCCTGGCTAGTTACCCCTTGG-3', S and J elements of DQB. The sequences of the mutant oligonucleotides used in gel shift are as follows: 5'-GATCCCTAGGGCCACCGTCTCTTTTACCAGG-3', S+J of DPA with mutations in S; 5'-GATCCTTACACCCAGG-3', J element of DPA; and EcoRI/HindIII fragment (51 bp) of pUC18 polylinker were also used. Gel shift assays were performed as described (36) with slight modification (24) using end-labeled DNA fragments.

Results

Protein Complexes Detected by EMSA Using Various J Element Probes. First, nuclear proteins were detected by EMSA with the J element probe of the DPA promoter (10 bp) alone using nuclear extracts of four different types of cells: Raji, which expresses class II MHC protein constitutively, HeLa, which is class II MHC protein negative, HeLa treated with IFN-γ to induce class II MHC protein expression, and HPB-ALL, a class II−negative human T cell line as a control. A single specific protein or protein complex that bound only weakly to the J element probe alone was detected in the class II-positive cell lines, Raji (Fig. 1 A, lane 2) and IFN-γ induced HeLa (Fig. 1 A, lane 4), but not in the class II−neg-
Figure 1. EMSA. (A) Proteins that bind to the J element of the DPA promoter. The J element (10 bp) synthetic probe was used in EMSA with nuclear extracts from four different types of cells; Raji (B cell line), uninduced and IFN-γ-induced HeLa (cervical carcinoma cell line), and HPB-ALL (T cell line). The arrow indicates the specific retarded complex. Faster migrating nonspecific bands were observed, i.e., competition with specific oligonucleotides did not lead to their disappearance. A 20-M excess of each specific unlabeled competitor oligonucleotide was used to compete for binding of the specific labeled oligonucleotide. (B) Proteins that bind to the S plus J elements of the DPA promoter and the J plus S elements of the DQB promoter. The S plus J elements of DPA (27 bp) or the J plus S elements of DQB (16 bp) synthetic probes were used in EMSA with nuclear extracts from Raji cells. The arrow indicates the specific retarded complex. A 20-M excess of each specific unlabeled competitor oligonucleotide was used to compete for binding of the specific labeled oligonucleotide. Note that in competition experiments with J plus S of DQB, the separate J and S probes were not used because these elements overlap in the DQB promoter. (C) Competition with mutant oligonucleotides for the protein-DNA complex formed with DPA S+J element. The probe used is a synthetic DPA S+J element 27 bp long. Nuclear extracts were made from Raji cells. The specific complex is indicated. Lanes 1 and 2 are the free probe and the probe with nuclear extract. Lanes 3–6, 7–10, and 11–15 show results of competition experiments with increasing amounts (20-, 50-, 100-, and 200-fold) of cold wild-type S+J, S+J with mutations in S, and S+J with mutations in J elements, respectively.

The specific complex was competed out by unlabeled synthetic J element probe (Fig. 1 A, lanes 3 and 5). This complex was competed out by unlabeled synthetic J element probe (Fig. 1 A, lanes 7 and 9) or by a synthetic probe that contained the overlapping J and S elements of DQB (Fig. 1 A, lanes 12 and 14). Several nonspecific complexes were also observed that were not competed out by either of these probes. No specific protein bands could be observed using a synthetic S element of DPA probe (7 bp) (data not shown). These results strongly suggest that the J elements of DPA and DQB bind to the J element of the DPA promoter. The J element (10 bp) synthetic probe was used in EMSA with nuclear extracts from four different types of cells; Raji (B cell line), uninduced and IFN-γ-induced HeLa (cervical carcinoma cell line), and HPB-ALL (T cell line). The arrow indicates the specific retarded complex. Faster migrating nonspecific bands were observed, i.e., competition with specific oligonucleotides did not lead to their disappearance. A 20-M excess of each specific unlabeled competitor oligonucleotide was used to compete for binding of the specific labeled oligonucleotide. (B) Proteins that bind to the S plus J elements of the DPA promoter and the J plus S elements of the DQB promoter. The S plus J elements of DPA (27 bp) or the J plus S elements of DQB (16 bp) synthetic probes were used in EMSA with nuclear extracts from Raji cells. The arrow indicates the specific retarded complex. A 20-M excess of each specific unlabeled competitor oligonucleotide was used to compete for binding of the specific labeled oligonucleotide. Note that in competition experiments with J plus S of DQB, the separate J and S probes were not used because these elements overlap in the DQB promoter. (C) Competition with mutant oligonucleotides for the protein-DNA complex formed with DPA S+J element. The probe used is a synthetic DPA S+J element 27 bp long. Nuclear extracts were made from Raji cells. The specific complex is indicated. Lanes 1 and 2 are the free probe and the probe with nuclear extract. Lanes 3–6, 7–10, and 11–15 show results of competition experiments with increasing amounts (20-, 50-, 100-, and 200-fold) of cold wild-type S+J, S+J with mutations in S, and S+J with mutations in J elements, respectively.
or multimerized form (Fig. 3A, lanes 1 and 2). The J element gave maximal enhancement (Fig. 2, lane 5). No activity was detected in either orientation (Fig. 2, lanes 7 and 8). A multimerized S plus J element (Fig. 2, lanes 3-6) also showed enhancement. The effect of mutations in the S element was examined in the gel shift assay (Fig. 1C). The effect of mutation in the J element (Fig. 1C) was also observed. The results suggest that the J element of DQB can function as a positive regulatory element for cooperation with the X and Y boxes of DPA (24). When the DPA S+J element was used as a probe and competition was carried out with unlabeled wild-type S+J element (Fig. 1C, lanes 3-6), or with S+J element with mutations in the S element (lanes 7-10), or in the J element (see Materials and Methods) the wild-type S+J element competed very effectively. However, mutations in the S element alone reduced the ability of the oligonucleotide to compete with the wild-type probe for complex formation, while mutations in the J element abolished its ability to compete, thereby providing support for the suggestion that cooperativity exists between S and J element in the DPA promoter in the binding of nuclear proteins.

Enhancer Activity of the S and J Elements in CAT Assays. The role of the S and J elements as functional enhancers was examined using heterologous promoters. Two enhancerless promoters, the minimal TK promoter (which has three cis-elements, Sp1, CCAAT, and a TATA box) (29) and the -40 IFN-β promoter (which has only one cis-acting element, the TATA box) (30) have been used to examine the enhancer activity of the J and S elements alone or in combination. Using TK promoter, substantial activity of the enhancer-promoter alone was observed in the class II protein-positive B cell line, Raji (Fig. 2; compare lane 2, no insert, with lane 1, the positive control pRSV CAT). An increase in activity was observed with the entire DPA promoter (−148 to −11 bp) in either orientation (Fig. 2, lanes 10 and 11). A lesser degree of enhancement was observed with the synthetic J element alone (Fig. 2, lanes 3 and 4) and with the S plus J elements (Fig. 2, lanes 7 and 8). A multimerized S plus J element gave maximal enhancement (Fig. 2, lane 5). No enhancement was observed with the S element alone, either as a single copy or multimerized (Fig. 2, lanes 5 and 6). Much weaker enhancement was observed with the DQB promoter in either orientation (Fig. 2, lanes 15 and 16) or with its J plus S element (Fig. 2, lanes 12, 13, and 14).

The enhancerless −40 IFN-β promoter yielded striking data. This promoter was virtually inactive in Raji cells (compare lanes 1 and 2 in Fig. 3A) and similarly, the J and S elements alone of DPA were inactive either in single copy or multimerized form (Fig. 3A, lanes 3-6). However, the synthetic probe containing the S plus J elements in either orientation (Fig. 3A, lanes 7 and 8) and in a single copy as well as multimerized (Fig. 3A, lanes 7, 9, and 10) were highly active relative to the intact promoter DPA (Fig. 3A, lanes 11 and 12). These data confirm the in vitro EMSA results (Fig. 1B) in showing a cooperative interaction between the S and J elements using in vivo CAT activity. The DQB promoter or its J plus S elements were also active, but less so (Fig. 3A, lanes 13-17).

Similar results with the −40 IFN-β promoter were also obtained using HeLa cells (Fig. 3B). No activity of any construct was detectable in uninduced HeLa cells. In IFN-γ-induced HeLa cells, the combination of S plus J elements of DPA was strikingly active as compared to either element alone (Fig. 3B, lanes 3-6), and was active in either orientation and as a monomer or multimer (Fig. 3B, lanes 7-10). The J plus S elements of DQB had minimal activity in this system corresponding to the fact that DQA and DQB genes cannot be induced by treatment with IFN-γ in HeLa cells (Fig. 3B, lanes 13-17).

The effect of mutations in the S element, in the interspace region and in the J element of the −40 IFN-β CAT plasmid containing either the −148 to −111 DPA promoter fragment or the S+J region of the DPA promoter alone are shown in Fig. 3C. Mutations in either the S element or the J element alone significantly reduced the activity as they did in the gel shift assay (Fig. 1C). The effect of mutation in the J element was again greater than the effect of mutation in

Figure 2. Plasmids containing DPA and DQB synthetic oligonucleotides linked to the TK promoter and their CAT activities in Raji B cells. 10 μg of CAT reporter plasmid and 2 μg of prSVhGH normalization plasmid were transfected into Raji cells by electroporation as described in Materials and Methods. The SEM for the normalization plasmid was <15% in this and all following experiments. Crude extracts were assayed for CAT activity by TLC. This experiment was repeated three times in Raji cells with similar results each time. An autoradiogram of a typical assay is shown.

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Figure 3. Plasmids containing DPA and DQB synthetic oligonucleotides linked to the -40 IFN-β promoter and their CAT activities in Raji, and uninduced and IFN-γ-induced HeLa cells. (A) In Raji cells. 10 μg of CAT reporter plasmid and 2 μg of pRSVhGH normalization plasmid were transfected into Raji cells by electroporation as described in Materials and Methods. Crude extracts were assayed for CAT activity by thin layer chromatography. This experiment was repeated three times in Raji cells with similar results each time. An autoradiogram of a typical assay is shown. (B) In HeLa cells without or with IFN-γ treatment. 10 μg of CAT reporter plasmid and 2 μg of pRSVhGH normalization plasmid were transfected into HeLa cells by the calcium phosphate method as described in Materials and Methods. 2 d after treating the transfectants with IFN-γ (500 U/ml), crude extracts were assayed for CAT activity by TLC. These experiments were repeated three times in HeLa cells with similar results each time. An autoradiogram of a typical assay is shown. (C) 10 μg of CAT reporter plasmid was transfected into Raji cells by electroporation as described in Materials and Methods. Crude extracts were assayed for CAT activity by thin layer chromatography and subsequent quantitation on a Betascope. CAT activities are reported as relative CAT activity where the activity of the wild-type insert is considered as 100%. Mutations in the S element, the interspace region, and the J element in the -148 to -11 DPA promoter construct brought down the CAT activity to 19, 87, and 7% of the wild-type, respectively. Mutations in the S element, the interspace region, and the J element in the context of DPA S+J brought down the activity to 19, 80, and 6% of the wild type, respectively. The CAT activities reported are the average of three independent transfections. The actual percentage of conversion for the wild-type insert is shown in parentheses. Each number represents the arithmetic mean of three independent transfections. The SEM was <20%.

Discussion

The control of gene regulation requires protein–protein and protein–DNA interaction. Many transcription factors mediate the regulation of DNA transcription by virtue of their ability to specifically interact with particular DNA sequences and proteins of the basal transcription apparatus (39-42). These transcription factors contain at least two domains: the DNA binding region which positions the protein on the DNA and the activating region that interacts with the transcription complexes (43). These transcription com-
### Table 1. Activities of –40 IFN-β CAT Reporter Plasmids in Different Mutants of Complementation Group A

| Cell lines   | pRSVCAT  | –      | J      | S      | S + J   | pDPA/148 |
|--------------|----------|--------|--------|--------|---------|-----------|
| Controls     | %        | %      | %      | %      | %       | %         |
| Raji         | 100 (45.4) | 6.7    | 6.6    | 5.8    | 76      | 207       |
| HeLa (−IFN-γ) | 100 (38.3) | 3.1    | 3.0    | 3.7    | 2.6     | 3.6       |
| (+ IFN-γ)    | 100 (34.4) | 7.8    | 4.8    | 5.1    | 38      | 135       |
| BLS phenotype |          |        |        |        |         |           |
| Complementation group A (type II) |         |        |        |        |         |           |
| BCH          | 100 (16.5) | 0.5    | 0.4    | 0.4    | 1.5     | 1.0       |
| BLS-2        | 100 (12.9) | 0.7    | 0.6    | 0.6    | 44      | 17        |
| RJ2.2.5      | 100 (66.1) | 2.3    | 1.8    | 2.6    | 64      | 14        |
| RM-2         | 100 (56.0) | 2.5    | 1.7    | 1.8    | 9.8     | 5.7       |
| RM-3         | 100 (52.1) | 2.8    | 1.8    | 2.0    | 23      | 3.4       |
| Clone 13     | 100 (93.3) | 1.3    | 1.0    | 1.1    | 4.4     | 7.1       |
| Complementation group B (type III) |         |        |        |        |         |           |
| Nacera       | 100 (36.2) | 1.0    | 0.9    | 0.9    | 77      | 7.9       |
| Ramia        | 100 (49.8) | 0.8    | 0.9    | 0.7    | 15      | 1.5       |
| Complementation group C (type III) |         |        |        |        |         |           |
| TF           | 100 (37.1) | 0.5    | 0.8    | 0.6    | 16      | 1.0       |
| Complementation group D (type ?) |         |        |        |        |         |           |
| 6.1.6        | 100 (21.3) | 5.3    | 5.0    | 5.0    | 58      | 21        |

10 μg of CAT reporter plasmid and 2 μg of pRSVhGH normalization plasmid were transfected into Raji, uninduced, and IFN-γ–induced HeLa and class II–negative mutant and BLS patient cells by electrophoration as described in Materials and Methods. Crude extracts were assayed for CAT activity by TLC and subsequent quantitation on a Betascope. CAT activities are reported as relative CAT activity standardized to pRSVCAT (100%) and are the average results of three to four independent transfections. The actual percentage of chloramphenicol acetylated using pRSVCAT in this series of transfections is shown in parentheses in the first column. Each number represents the arithmetic mean of at least three independent transfections. The SEM was <20%.

Complexes include proteins (coactivators) that do not bind to DNA but mediate interactions between the DNA binding proteins. Regulation of transcription can be accomplished by modulating the quantities or activities of sequence-specific transcription factors. "Basal-level" transcription from RNA polymerase II promoters involves the formation of a multiprotein complex at the TATA box region, which contains RNA polymerase II and a set of "general" transcription factors, such as TFIIA, TFIIIB, TFIIID, TFIIIE, TFIIIF, and TFIIH. "Activated" transcription requires the binding of "regulatory" transcription factors to other DNA sequences in the promoter. These regulatory factors are thought to mediate activation by forming protein–protein interactions with the general transcription factors, sometimes through the protein–protein interactions of coactivators (44). Direct coordination between the regulatory gene specific or tissue specific and general transcription factors are not yet well established. However, four viral transactivating proteins, the adenovirus E1A (45, 46), the herpes virus VP16 (47), the Epstein-Barr virus Zta (48), and the cytomegalovirus IE2 (49), have been shown to contact directly the TATA box binding protein TFIIID and, in the case of VP16, the general factor TFII B (50).

The class II X and Y boxes are regulatory transcription elements necessary but not sufficient for maximal transcription of class II MHC genes. These cis-elements have been shown to bind the transcription factors RF-X (X1 box), hXBP-1 (X2 box), and NF-YA and YB (Y box) (6, 7). Other upstream elements such as the pyrimidine tract (Py), the S (also included in or called W, Z, or H), and the J element are required in addition to the X and Y boxes (6, 7, 24–26).
The W box was shown to be important for optimal levels of B cell expression and essential for IFN-γ induction (51–53). Two protein complexes were preliminarily shown to interact with the W box of the DRA gene, which includes overlapping J and S elements (54, 55). In a previous paper, the possible role of the S and J elements in transcription of human class II MHC genes was examined. The S element is a conserved sequence element found 15 bp upstream of the X and Y elements. X and Y function together as a specific enhancer of class II MHC gene expression (33). S element has been shown to be functionally important for the DRA promoter (21, 22). Later, as the results of 5' deletion and mutagenesis analysis, a fourth element, called the J element, was found in the DPA and DQB genes (24). A similar sequence element was located in the proximal promoters of each of the other human and murine class II MHC genes, but its possible functional role in these other genes has not been examined. The J element is located at different positions in the DPA, DQB, and other class II MHC genes and thus had not previously been detected by sequence alignments (24–26). Recently, two DNA binding proteins that bind to the J element, but only in constructs which also contain the S element, were identified. One of these, encoded by clone 18, has been studied in detail (56). This protein contains a novel conserved domain at its NH2 terminus, a central acidic activation region, and a COOH-terminal DNA binding region containing 11 zinc fingers. Antisense constructs of each of these new J element binding proteins dramatically inhibited IFN-γ-induced class II MHC gene expression in HeLa cells, but constitutive expression in established B cell lines was more difficult to inhibit (Sugawara, M. unpublished observations).

The present paper provides additional evidence that the S and J elements function together in the transcription of class II MHC genes. First, in extracts of the Raji B cell line, a DNA binding complex was detected with the J element probe alone (Fig. 1A), but was much more prominent using probes containing both the S and J elements (Fig. 1B). Similarly, in competition experiments with oligonucleotides, competition could be observed only with competitors containing both S and J (Fig. 1B). Also, mutations in the DPA promoter S and J elements individually, but in the context of the S plus J region, led to a significant loss in the ability of the mutant oligonucleotides to compete with the wild-type probe for the complex (Fig. 1C). Finally, using two enhancerless promoters, the TK promoter (Fig. 2) and the −40 IFN-β promoter (Fig. 3), the cooperativity of the S and J elements as enhancers, both in Raji cells which constitutively express class II MHC protein and in IFN-γ-induced HeLa cells, was dramatically illustrated. Two different S and J element sequences were used, that from DPA gene and that from the DQB gene, in all of these experiments. The two elements have different relative locations in these two genes. In the DPA gene, the J element is located 10 bp downstream from the S element, and overlaps the X1 box. In the DQB gene, the J element is located immediately upstream of the S element, which is overlapped by 1 bp. In the DPA gene in particular, cooperativity of the two elements separated by 10 bp is unusual. In any event, these results strongly suggest that the cooperativity of the S plus J elements is a major transcriptional feature of regulation in class II antigen-positive Raji and IFN-γ-treated HeLa cells. Further supportive evidence (Fig. 3C) was provided by the −40 IFN-β promoter CAT assays which showed that mutations made in the S or the J element alone in the context of either the −148 to −11 DPA promoter fragment or the DPA S+J region led to significant loss in CAT activity. Mutations made in the inter-space region had a minor influence.

Finally, the function of the S plus J enhancer in class II-negative human B cell lines obtained either from patients with the BLS or produced by in vitro mutagenesis has been examined (Fig. 4 and Table 2). These lines have previously been shown to fall into three and possibly four complementation groups. Members of each group have been examined. As expected, the full proximal promoter of the DPA gene (−148 to −11 bp containing the S, J, X, and Y elements) when

| Cell lines            | Activity of S + J* | DQ Expression† |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Raji (control)        | +                  | +              |
| RJ2.2.5, RM-3, BLS-2  | +                  | -              |
| Clone 13              | -                  | +              |
| RM-2, BCH             | -                  | -              |

* Enhancer activity using the −40 IFN-β heterologous promoter.
† Surface expression using the mAb Leu 10 for FACS® analysis.
cloned upstream of the -40 IFN-β promoter was inactive in all of the class II-negative cell lines, although high level activity of the same constructs was observed in Raji cells and in IFN-γ-induced HeLa cells. However, the S plus J elements cloned upstream of the -40 IFN-β promoter were fully active in cells of complementation groups B, C, and D, indicating that the factor missing or defective in these groups does not involve these elements. With cells representing complementation group A, a surprising anomaly was found. In three members of this group (RJ2.2.5, RM-3, and BLS-2), the S plus J elements were highly active, despite the lack of activity of the intact DPA promoter, as in groups B, C, and D. By contrast, in clone 13, RM-2, and BCH, the activity was either very low or absent (57). Thus, these cis-acting S and J elements must somehow be involved as a target(s) of transcription factor(s) missing, defective, or inactive in the RM-2, clone 13, and BCH mutant B cell lines. Moreover, this assay subdivided members of complementation group A further. Previously, clone 13 had been distinguished from other members of group A by the fact that it expresses normal levels of DQ, although it is negative for DR and DP, while other members of the group, including both RM-2 and BCH, are negative for all three isotypes of class II protein. Thus, these experiments define three subgroups of complementation group A (Table 2). In addition, BCH has previously been shown to differ from other members of the subgroup by in vivo footprinting (38). A genetic defect has been identified in two members of group A cells, the in vitro mutant cell line RJ2.2.5 and the patient cell line BLS-2. This factor CIITA, which is IFN-γ inducible, and is not a DNA binding protein, was shown to have a large deletion in RJ2.2.5 and to be missing an exon of 24 amino acids in the mRNA in BLS-2, as the consequence of a mutation in a splice donor site (18). The other members of this complementation group have not yet been examined, and thus one possibility would be that they differ in the precise defect in CIITA. Since these defects do not complement each other, (i.e., they all belong to complementation group A), they must carry mutations in the same gene. One plausible interpretation would be that this gene/protein, i.e., CIITA, interacts with multiple transcription factors (i.e., factors that bind to J, S, X, Y, TATA, and/or YY1 [58] boxes), and that the different defects involve mutations in different regions of CIITA specific for these different interactions. For example, the defects in clone 13, RM-2, and BCH may involve a region required for interaction with S plus J element binding proteins and would be reflected in the inability of the S/J elements in the heterologous promoter construct, the -40 IFN-β promoter. (For an earlier discussion of the anomaly of clone 13, see reference 16.) In any event, the manner in which the putative genetic defects might relate to the failure of the S plus J elements to function as enhancers in some cells of this complementation group and their normal function in other mutants remain to be examined.

We thank Ms. Kahori Sugawara for excellent technical assistance.

This work was supported by National Institutes of Health grants DK30241 and CA47554 to J. L. Strominger. P. D. Ponath was the recipient of an Arthritis Investigator award, T. Scholl of an American Cancer Society fellowship, and S. K. Mahanta of an Irvington Institute fellowship.

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Received for publication 25 August 1994 and in revised form 6 March 1995.

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