

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Identification of asymmetric hybrid incompatibility loci in F1 generation between *Caenorhabditis briggsae* and *C. nigoni*

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## Abstract

Hybrid incompatibility (HI) is frequently manifested as lethality or sterility in hybrid progeny between related species, and plays a key role in speciation. The genetic basis of HI has been intensively studied in model organisms such as yeast and fruit fly over decades, and “*Two rules of speciation*” have been observed across species. *C. elegans* as a nematode model organism contributes little to speciation research mainly due to lack of a close relative with which it can mate and produce viable progeny. Such limitation has recently been alleviated by identification of *C. nigoni*, a close relative, also termed as sister species, of *C. briggsae*. The two can make and produce a handful of viable hybrids. Both species are members of *Elegans* supergroup. Hybrid cross between the two species uncovered asymmetric hybrid incompatibilities, i.e. crossing direction-dependent hybrid male sterility and inviability. Asymmetry was also observed in F1 hybrids from reciprocal crosses exclusively in male but not female (Woodruff, Eke, Baird, Félix, & Haag, 2010). Asymmetry was also observed in backcrosses between the F1 female hybrids and the parental species. For example, F2 progeny fathered by *C. briggsae* suffered almost 100% embryonic lethality for both males and females, whereas those fathered by *C. nigoni* were partially viable and fertile.

Further study of HI between these two species was initiated by investigating how *C. briggsae* chromosomal fragments in an otherwise pure *C. nigoni* genome affect fitness of hybrid worms. The hybrid worms were generated by repeatedly backcrossing *C. briggsae* genomic fragments each bearing a visible chromosomal-integrated marker to *C. nigoni* to produce introgression lines. Characterization of the introgression lines provided a detailed HI landscape of between the two

species. Multiple intervals on the *C. briggsae* X chromosome were responsible for hybrid male inviability or sterility while most of the *C. briggsae* autosomes were not involved in these male phenotypes (Bi et al., 2015). RNA sequencing was performed in sterile male worms bearing independent introgressions, revealing a down-regulated gene expression pattern (Li et al., 2016).

To uncover the HI mechanism underlying the asymmetric HI phenotypes exhibited in hybrids in F1 generation, I performed a genome-wide screening to identify HI loci that are responsible for the hybrid male inviability and sterility in F1 as well as hybrid breakdown in F2. By crossing between *C. briggsae* and *C. nigoni* introgression lines bearing a known *C. briggsae* fragment, I was able to construct hybrid animals homozygous or heterozygous for *C. briggsae* alleles on the introgression while those on counterpart of *C. nigoni* were absent. Contrasting the HI phenotypes here and those between two wild-type parents allows mapping of the loci responsible for the hybrid asymmetric phenotypes. The aggregated introgressions cover 94.6% of the *C. briggsae* genome, including 100% of the X chromosome. Surprisingly, I identified another two *C. briggsae* genomic intervals on chromosomes II and IV that can rescue the hybrid male inviability but not the male sterility in F1 fathered by *C. nigoni*, suggesting the involvement of differential epistatic interactions in the asymmetric hybrid male fertility and inviability. What's more, I observed that two independent *C. briggsae* X fragments that produce male sterility in *C. nigoni* as an introgression rescued hybrid male sterility in F1 fathered by *C. briggsae*. Backcrossing of the rescued sterile F1 male to its parental species showed that they can alleviate the F2 hybrid breakdown by a handful of viable F2 mothered by *C. briggsae*. Subsequent backcrossing of the rescued sterile males with *C. nigoni* led to the isolation of a 1.1-Mb genomic interval that specifically interacts with an X-linked introgression, which is essential for hybrid male fertility. In

addition, I further identified three *C. briggsae* genomic intervals on chromosome I, II, and IV that produced inviability in all F1 progeny, dependent on or independent of the parent-of-origin. Taken together, I identified multiple independent interacting loci that are responsible for asymmetric HI phenotypes especially hybrid male sterility and inviability, which lays a foundation for their molecular characterization.

# Table of Contents

<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>xv</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b> .....	<b>xvi</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Literature review of Hybrid Incompatibility study in <i>Caenorhabditis</i> species</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 The history of hybrid incompatibility</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 <i>Caenorhabditis</i> species as model organisms in HI study</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.2.1 Introduction of <i>Caenorhabditis</i> species .....	5
1.2.2 Overview of <i>C. elegans</i> intraspecific HI study .....	6
1.2.3 Overview of interspecific HI study between <i>Caenorhabditis</i> species .....	10
<b>1.3 Objectives</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 2. Genome-wide investigation on HI landscape between <i>C. briggsae</i> and <i>C. nigoni</i> based on introgression lines</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>16</b>

<b>2.2</b>	<b>Result.....</b>	<b>18</b>
	The multistep routine is functional for follow-up HI study while some genetic complications need further attention. ....	18
	Suppression was observed in the recombination between chromosomes from different species, probably due to substantial sequence divergences. ....	28
	Male inviability and sterility were exclusively observed when a relatively large introgression substituted counterpart of <i>C. nigoni</i> X.....	30
	Recessive and dominant HI loci were found widespread in <i>C. briggsae</i> genome. ....	34
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>41</b>
	The accuracy of HI landscape between the two species can be improved with the progress of genome assembly of both species .....	41
	Hybrid male inviable alleles are mostly recessive on X but more likely to be dominant on autosome, in particular the piRNA-rich region. ....	41
	Multiple DMI models are involved in male inviability sterility produced by <i>C. briggsae</i> X fragment, consistent to Haldane’s rule. ....	43
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Material and methods.....</b>	<b>44</b>
2.4.1	Transgenic insertion of visible markers in <i>C. briggsae</i> genome .....	44
2.4.2	Introgressive backcrossing <i>C. briggsae</i> with <i>C. nigoni</i> .....	45
2.4.3	Score HI phenotypes in introgression lines.....	48
<b>Chapter 3.</b>	<b>RNA-seq analysis of male sterility produced by two independent X-linked</b>	

<b>introgression .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.2 Results .....</b>	<b>55</b>
Morphological study suggested that the male sterile introgressions on X led to defective gonad and reduced fertilization ability of sperm. ....	55
Substitution on independent regions of <i>C. nigoni</i> X triggered a similar down-regulation pattern of genes that are significantly enriched on autosomes in producing male sterility. ....	62
Male bearing sterile introgression showed enriched down-regulation in spermatogenesis genes but their TE transcription was not drastically altered. ....	66
<b>3.3 Discussion.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>3.4 Material and Methods .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Identification of X-A interacting loci responsible for F1 hybrid male inviability and sterility .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4.2 Results .....</b>	<b>78</b>
Homozygosity of <i>C. briggsae</i> alleles in F1 cannot restore their self-reproduction ability. ....	78
Substitution of two independent <i>C. nigoni</i> autosomal regions rescues male inviability in the F1(n, b) hybrids. ....	79

Substituting part of <i>C. nigoni</i> X with <i>C. briggsae</i> introgressions does not produce hybrid male inviability while some introgressions can rescue male hybrid sterility .....	84
Hybrid F2 breakdown is partially rescued by fertility-rescuing introgressions in the cross of fertile F1 male with <i>C. briggsae</i> but not in the opposite cross direction.....	94
<i>C. briggsae</i> autosomal loci interact with <i>zzyIR10330</i> to rescue the hybrid F1 male sterility, which led to the isolation of these loci on the Chromosome II.....	102
Homozygosity of <i>C. briggsae</i> autosomal fragments especially the piRNA-rich regions plays an important role in hybrid F2 breakdown fathered by <i>C. briggsae</i> . .....	105
<b>4.3 Discussion.....</b>	<b>109</b>
The parent-of-origin effects from both species play a significant role in hybrid viability in F1 and BC2. ....	109
Cross direction-independent killing effects from homozygosity of piRNA-rich region indicate substantial species divergence. ....	110
<i>C. briggsae</i> autosomal alleles are at least partially dominant in regulating hybrid male fertility by X-autosome interaction. ....	111
Multiple recessive pathways observing the Dobzhansky-Muller may be involved in both hybrid male sterility and inviability. ....	113
<b>4.4 Material and Methods .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Supplements .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Supplementary table 1.</b> List of <i>C. nigoni</i> backcrossing lines bearing a <i>C. briggsae</i>	



introgression.....	119
<b>Supplementary table 2.</b> List of the <i>C. briggsae</i> -specific genotyping primers based on “cb4” version of <i>C. briggsae</i> genome assembly as an update to the primer list in published work .....	125
<b>Supplementary table 3.</b> Single Factor ANOVA test for lengths (Mb) between introgressions from different chromosomes and between X-linked introgressions categorized by male HI phenotypes.....	127
<b>Reference</b> .....	<b>128</b>
<b>CURRICULUM VITAE</b> .....	<b>136</b>