Gene expression defines natural changes in mammalian lifespan

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Summary

Mammals differ more than 100-fold in maximum lifespan, which can be altered in either direction during evolution, but the molecular basis for natural changes in longevity is not understood. Divergent evolution of mammals also led to extensive changes in gene expression within and between lineages. To understand the relationship between lifespan and variation in gene expression, we carried out RNA-seq-based gene expression analyses of liver, kidney, and brain of 33 diverse species of mammals. Our analysis uncovered parallel evolution of gene expression and lifespan, as well as the associated life-history traits, and identified the processes and pathways involved. These findings provide direct insights into how nature reversibly adjusts lifespan and other traits during adaptive radiation of lineages.

Key words: aging; lifespan; mammals; gene expression; life-history traits.

Introduction

Extant mammals diversified dramatically, featuring more than 100-fold difference in species maximum lifespan, 100-million-fold difference in body mass and adaptations to both terrestrial and aquatic life as well as to powered flight and subterranean life. Nature has been continuously and macroevolution of morphological traits has been questioned (Stearns, 2000). Lifespan, like other life-history traits, exhibits a moderate phylogenetic signal (Blomberg et al., 2003) that, at the molecular level, could be explained by accumulation of sequence polymorphisms and interspecies variation in transcription levels (Janecka et al., 2012). However, interplay between and within heritable and environmental components directing micro- and macroevolution of morphological traits has been questioned (Steams, 2000).

It was proposed that adaptive changes in morphology and development are more evident in alterations in gene expression than in protein sequences (Carroll, 2005). Indeed, local ecological adaptations are 10-fold more likely to affect gene expression than amino acid sequences (Fraser, 2013). Therefore, studies on gene evolution at the expression level could provide further insights in phenotype evolution.

In this study, we prepared 143 RNA-seq gene expression profiles for liver, kidney, and brain and carried out comparative gene expression analyses of 33 mammalian species. By considering gene expression as a quantitative character, we examined evolution of gene expression across whole-organism life-history traits. We offer a concept of parallel evolution of mammalian life histories and gene expression profiles over evolutionary timescale and uncover the biological processes involved.
Results and Discussion

Analysis of gene expression to elucidate lifespan and other life-history strategies

We carried out an analysis of gene expression divergence on 33 species of terrestrial mammals of young adult age belonging to Euungulata (n = 4), Carnivora (n = 4), Chiroptera (n = 2), Didelphimorphia (n = 1), Diprotodontia (n = 1), Erinaceomorpha (n = 1), Lagomorpha (n = 1), Monotremata (n = 1), Primates (n = 8), Rodentia (n = 9), and Soricomorpha (n = 1) lineages (Table S1). Most representatives of these lineages were placental mammals (Placentalia), except for platypus (Monotremes), and opossum and sugar glider (Marsupials), and the total divergence of examined lineages corresponded to a period of ~160 million years (Fig. 1A). Evolution of these mammals yielded widespread variation in their life histories, such as time to maturity, maximum lifespan, and oxygen consumption (as a measure of basal metabolic rate, BMR) (Fig. 1B). The relationship between these life histories defines a set of lineage-specific functional trade-offs and adaptive investments developed during environmental specialization. For example, most primates are characterized by extended longevity, slow growth, and reduced BMR, whereas most rodents, and in particular the murid species (Eumuroidea), commonly utilize opportunistic-type strategies characterized by rapid development and growth, low body mass, large litters, and short lifespan (Fig. 1B). Moreover, some organisms such as representatives of Chiroptera and Hystriocognathi feature Eumuroidea-sized species, but possess life-history attributes of larger, longer-lived mammals.

We analyzed gene expression in three organs, liver, kidney and brain, because of their easier availability, dominance of one cell type (i.e. liver), difference in metabolic functions, size of organs (which is a limitation for smaller animals), and compatibility with data from other laboratories. The majority of the examined species were represented by duplicated (52–60% of species) or triplicated (30–42% of species) biological replicates to account for within species gene expression variation (Table S1).

We generated 25–60 millions of 51-bp paired-end RNA-seq reads for each biological replicate. Reads were then mapped to genomic sequences of 21 organisms obtained from Ensembl and NCBI databases (Table S2). We used database gene model annotations and precomputed 1–1 orthologous sequence relationships for these organisms to calculate gene expression values defined as fragments per kilobase of transcript per million RNA-seq reads mapped (FPKM). Depending on species, RNA-seq read alignment efficiency varied from 55 to 99% (Table S2). For 12 species with no available genome sequences, we de novo assembled full-length transcriptomic contigs using RNA-seq reads (Fig. S1, Table S3), ab initio predicted encoded peptides (Figs S2 and S3, Table S4), and inferred 1–1 orthologous sequence relationships with database proteins (Supplementary Information, Fig. S4). We further focused our analyses on the expression of protein-coding genes with 1–1 orthologous relationship, derived from the dataset of 19 643 unique groups of sequences (Fig. S5, Table S5).

Relationship between life histories and phylogeny of mammals

We first examined the extent to which phylogeny of the species in our study influenced life-history evolution, including gestation period, weaning time, maturation time, maximum lifespan, growth, body weight, and metabolic rate (Table S6). We used the λ model (Pagel, 1999) to test life-history variation simultaneously against randomized value (no effect of phylogeny) and against the diffusive or the Brownian motion (BM) model (neutral drift). Species phylogeny provided the null distribution, given an appropriate model of neutral evolution. The method produces a quantitative estimate of the phylogenetic signal (the extent to which correlation in traits reflects shared evolutionary history of the species) in a character, the λ parameter. Under the BM model, traits are inherited from a common ancestor and diverge linearly in a manner analogous to random walk. λ describes the proportion of variance that can be attributed to BM. The value of λ equal or close to 1 suggests a character evolution evolving under the stochastic process, whereas λ < 1 indicates departure from neutral drift. We ensured that the λ model performs well, even when the true model of trait evolution deviates from strict BM process (Supplementary Information, Figs S6 and S7).

The data showed that life-history variation of study subjects significantly departs from the diffusive model of evolution. For example, phylogeny could explain only a moderate portion of variance (λ = 0.65, P = 0.02, likelihood-ratio test) in maximum lifespan (Table S7). Body weight exhibited relatively greater constraints than the other examined traits (λ = 0.39, P = 0.003, likelihood-ratio test). The results indicated
that with increasing genetic distance, phenotypic divergence becomes nonlinear within and between lineages.

Although life-history evolution deviated from phylogeny, distinct traits preserve covariance with each other. To demonstrate this, we analyzed life-history data of ~800 species of mammals (de Magalhaes & Costa, 2009) using nonphylogenetic regression (Fig. 2). The analysis showed that, for example, maximum lifespan strongly covaries with body weight ($r^2 = 0.47$, $P = 4 \times 10^{-113}$, $F$-test), time to maturity ($r^2 = 0.71$, $P = 1 \times 10^{-156}$, $F$-test), and other examined traits (Fig. 2). The data suggest that selective forces governed parallel evolution of life histories. These forces maximized fitness and interdependence between distinct traits and may also represent conserved underlying mechanisms.

**Life-history evolution shaped interspecies gene expression variation**

Mammalian life histories exhibited drift and selection (Blomberg et al., 2003). Yet, little research has been conducted to determine the mechanisms of trait evolution in mammals because the exceptional level of life-history variation was historically influenced by complex interactions between genetics and environment.

Because life-history variation significantly departed from the model of neutral evolution, we adopted nonphylogenetic ordinary least squares (OLS) instead of phylogenetic regression to assess the relationship between transcript levels and whole-organism traits. When used improperly, the phylogenetic regression can have poor statistical performance, even under some circumstances in which the type I error rate of the method is not inflated over its nominal level (Revell, 2010). We further applied Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance as a post-hoc test to ensure that interspecies gene expression variation exceeded those within species. The analyses identified gene sets whose expression levels significantly associate (FDR-corrected $P < 0.05$, $F$-test) with life-history variation (Fig. S8).

Overall, at the level of FDR-corrected $P < 0.05$, we detected ~5000 unique 1–1 orthologs significantly associated with 7 traits in the three organs with some overlap (381 transcripts) between organs (Table 1). As an example, Fig. 3A shows expression profiles of 3249 transcripts associated with gradient of time to maturity variation in liver, kidney, and brain. Although organisms examined in the study represent both laboratory and nonlaboratory populations, the sources of measurement error such as sampling and biological variations were not overdispersed compared to the estimate.

The analyses provided evidence that the interspecies variation in the expression of numerous orthologs in mammals was shaped by evolution constraints in agreement with gradient in life-history change. Life-history variation of animals in our study could explain ~11–18% of total variability in interspecies transcript levels (Table 1), whereas variability in the expression of other orthologs could be explained by drift (Figs S9 and S10, Table S8) and stabilizing constraints (Figs S11 and S12, Table S9).

It was reported previously that life-history variation governed by natural selection explains expression variation of 22% genes in marine species (Whitehead & Crawford, 2006b). Thus, gene expression...
evolution in vertebrates exhibits widespread selective constraints, whereas drift appears to account for less variation than expected.

Gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA) revealed statistically nonrandom distribution of transcripts positively and negatively correlated with life-history traits among GO functions (Figs 3B and 4, Dataset S1). In liver, we detected downregulated mitochondrial metabolic GO functions, such as metabolism of saturated and unsaturated fatty acids, and degradation of amino acids and their derivatives linked to ATP production through the TCA cycle and mitochondrial respiratory pathways (Fig. 3B, cluster C3). In brain, downregulated functions included inositol and calcium-mediated signaling pathways and transmembrane channel transport (Fig. 3B, cluster C2). DNA repair and defense GO functions were positively associated with gradient in lifespan variation, maturation time, and related traits (Fig. 3B, cluster C1).

We detected minor overlap, which did not reach the level of statistical significance ($P = 0.12$, hypergeometric test), between individual genes shown to alter lifespan in model organisms (de Magalhaes & Costa, 2009) and genes associated with natural variation in life histories (Fig. 3F). The data suggest that evolutionary changes in lifespan in mammals are associated with coordinated reprogramming of expression levels at the genomewide scale rather than with changes in expression of individual genes.

Lifespan varies among individuals of the same species, and accuracy of the estimates may be influenced by environmental conditions and sample size (Kawasaki et al., 2008). Thus, gene sets identified in the study may be inflated partially by quality of independent variables. We further used the gene set associated with maturation time as a representative of other sets to assess sequence conservation of the encoded proteins. The analysis showed that the downregulated orthologs were more conserved than the upregulated ones (Fig. 3C). We also used Shannon’ information entropy criterion (Mirny & Shakhnovich, 1999) to evaluate the number of radical amino acid substitutions and found that the number of such substitutions was also lower in the downregulated sequences (Fig. 3D).

A positive relationship between amino acid substitution rate and gene expression divergence was previously reported for several species of mammals (Khaitovich et al., 2005). The phenomenon could be explained by nonuniform GC content in the genome defining frequencies of transitions and transversions (Misawa & Kikuno, 2011). Our data suggest parallel evolution of biological sequences and expression levels (Fig. 3E) and also point out that the degree of purifying forces varies between distinct functional classes of sequences.

### Intimate relationship between life-history variation and central metabolism

We examined most relevant genes and biological pathways associated with life histories (Figs 4, 5 and S13). GSEA showed statistically significant label overrepresentation in the central energy metabolism combining numerous pathways such as pyruvate metabolism ($P = 1 \times 10^{-7}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. 6), carbohydrate degradation pathways ($P = 1 \times 10^{-5}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S14), catabolism of tryptophan ($P = 4 \times 10^{-5}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S15), lysine ($P = 3 \times 10^{-6}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S16) and valine ($P = 7 \times 10^{-7}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S17), oxidation and biosynthesis of fatty acids ($P = 2 \times 10^{-5}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S18), Ppar ($P = 4 \times 10^{-4}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S19), peroxisome ($P = 1 \times 10^{-6}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S20), Ampk ($P = 8 \times 10^{-4}$, hypergeometric test, Fig. S21), growth hormone (Gh/Ghr) signaling, and others (Fig. 5). Interestingly, adaptive variation in growth and lifespan of marine vertebrates was also shown to be associated with expression changes in central metabolic pathways (St-Cyr et al., 2008). Taking together, these data suggest fundamental relatedness of strategies governing parallel life history and transcriptome evolution in vertebrates.

Genetic interventions re-balancing expression of the effectors of these pathways are capable of modifying life-history attributes in opposite directions. In yeast, changing gene dosage for glycolytic enzyme genes resulted in variation in life-history traits such as growth and lifespan (Wang et al., 2010). In mice, deletion of Ghr results in increased longevity (Coschigano et al., 2003), whereas elevated growth hormone treatment shortens lifespan (Panici et al., 2010). Consistent with experimental data, natural expression divergence of Ghr negatively correlates with life-history variation of mammals (Fig. 5).

Statistical analysis revealed significant relationships between life-history variation and expression levels of numerous genes involved in DNA repair, defense, and detoxification (Fig. 5). We offer functional classification of these orthologs based on the activities in Datasets S2

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**Table 1** Statistics on genes whose expression variation is associated with life-history variation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (FDR &lt; 0.05)*</th>
<th>Liver (n = 14 679)</th>
<th>Kidney (n = 16 063)</th>
<th>Brain (n = 16 424)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nb. of genes^1</td>
<td>% from total</td>
<td>Nb. of genes^1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestation period</td>
<td>1017 (121)</td>
<td>6.9 (0.8)</td>
<td>588 (126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaning time</td>
<td>1690 (198)</td>
<td>11.5 (1.3)</td>
<td>1098 (203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body weight</td>
<td>506 (44)</td>
<td>3.4 (0.3)</td>
<td>116 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth rate</td>
<td>918 (116)</td>
<td>6.5 (0.8)</td>
<td>698 (173)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to maturity</td>
<td>1740 (149)</td>
<td>11.9 (1.0)</td>
<td>998 (88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum lifespan</td>
<td>1399 (90)</td>
<td>9.5 (0.6)</td>
<td>713 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metabolic rate</td>
<td>510 (44)</td>
<td>3.5 (0.3)</td>
<td>213 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined^2</td>
<td>2610 (134)</td>
<td>17.8 (0.9)</td>
<td>1753 (30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FDR denotes OLS P-value cut-off.

^1Number of unique genes associated with trait variation and number of genes specific for a trait (in brackets).

^2Number of unique genes identified in the organ and its overlap between all traits (in brackets).

^3Number of unique genes identified in three organs for a specific trait and interorgan overlap (in brackets).

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and S3. As a less established example, haptoglobin (Hp) and hemopexin (Hpx) were reported to prevent oxidative damage resulting from hemoglobin in erythrocytes as well as protect kidney in humans (Burbea et al., 2004). There is a positive relationship between lifespan and liver expression of Hp (r² = 0.51, FDR corrected P = 5 × 10⁻⁴, F-test) and Hpx (r² = 0.38, FDR corrected P = 1 × 10⁻⁴, F-test), although such a relationship would also reflect species allometry and constitutive differences among homologous organs.

One would expect that changes in gene expression result in correlated downstream changes in protein levels because of a positive relationship between transcript and protein levels in mammals (Schwanhausser et al., 2011). Therefore, rates of bioenergetic conversion and/or its efficiency may be differentially adjusted, in an organ-specific manner, in mammals in accordance with the gradient of life-history change. As a consequence, this would contribute to the levels of metabolic by-products which are thought to influence aging (Houtkooper et al., 2012). A higher rate of metabolism may allocate energy resources necessary for growth and reproduction in the opportunistic-type organisms such as Eumuroidea species.

Relationship between body weight and longevity traits

Body weight was shown to exhibit nonrandom association with life-history traits (de Magalhaes et al., 2007). When the body size is
Fig. 4  A cluster map that shows GO terms associated with gradient of life-history variation. Columns on the plot correspond to life histories (bottom). Rows show GO terms. Sub rectangles in red denote GO terms positively correlated with life-history variables. Negatively correlated GO terms are in blue. Color intensities denote statistical significance of GO term (negative logarithm of FDR corrected P-value, bar in the bottom right corner of plot). Life histories and GO terms were clustered using the Ward’s method and Euclidean distance metric. GO terms were grouped into five clusters using constant height cutoff method (left side). Titles of representative GO terms are presented on the right side of plot (in brackets).
increased in natural populations, fecundity is maximized through a longer period of growth and increased lifespan, providing trade-offs between reproduction and survival mediated through body size and development time.

We calculated the residuals of several traits (maturation time and maximum lifespan) to elucidate whether these variables evolved under the stochastic evolution. We excluded allometric component from the linear regression models (Fig. 7A and B) and calculated the $\lambda$ model on...
We found that the residual of maturation time significantly departs from neutral evolution defined by phylogeny variance structure ($k = 0.72, P = 0.04$, likelihood-ratio test). The analyses also demonstrated a similar relationship between phylogeny and residuals of other traits, such as maximum lifespan and oxygen consumption (Table S7). The observations provided further evidence of constraints contributing to life-history evolution in mammals, probably through interplay between drift and selection.

Nonrandom association of gene expression with life-history residuals

We identified genes whose expression variation explains the residual of maximum lifespan and maturation time by examining statistical interaction between life histories and body weight variable in the OLS model (Fig. 5, Table 2). The identified genes overlapped with the gene sets associated with respective life histories, but not with body weight (Fig. S22).

GSEA indicated label overrepresentation in the central metabolism, including mitochondrial and peroxisomal GO functions (Fig. 7C, Datasets S4 and S5) and DNA repair such as nonhomologous end-joining pathway (NHEJ) (Fig. 8). The latter pathway is predominantly upregulated in the primate lineage. Genes associated with NHEJ ($Xrcc5, Xrcc6, Prkdc$, etc.) mediate telomeric and chromosomal DNA repair through interaction with Wrn, whose functional impairment may promote accelerated aging syndrome and genome instability in humans (Ferguson et al., 2000). The processes involved in genome stability related to aging are likely to be more complex than an enhancement in simple NHEJ kinetics or telomere length,
but may be related to maintenance of telomere capping (Lorenzini et al., 2009).

Overall, the analysis showed that the residual of life-history traits does not provide additional statistical support to explain life-history variation at the level of gene expression, although significantly reduces the associated gene sets.

**Conclusions**

To our knowledge, this is the first systemic report that provides a direct evidence of widespread selection on gene expression governed by evolution of whole-organism traits in mammals. Body weight exhibited greater constraints and probably influenced evolution of other life histories, such as lifespan and maturation time. There is reciprocal interaction between forces that maximize fitness and equilibrium between life-history traits. Our analyses provide a direct evidence that expression variation of at least ~11–18% orthologs exhibited constraints in heterologous mammalian organs and evolved in agreement with gradient of life-history variation.

Although the data may reflect allometry and local adaptive responses of species to habitat, we observed nonrandom association of gene expression variation with functions related to central energy metabolism.
The magnitude of these changes was significantly correlated with gradient of life-history variation. This would make biological sense because reversible changes in species-specific developmental dynamics during chronological evolution required flexible and adjustable instruments allowing allocating cellular resources, such as energy, for growth and reproduction.

The results are intriguing because numerous case studies of aging and dietary interventions such as CR also showed gene expression alterations associated with energy metabolism, growth hormone, and stress signaling pathways (Lee et al., 1999; Anderson & Weindruch, 2009). CR may reduce the levels of by-products by switching glucose degradation to gluconeogenesis and lowering the rate of mitochondrial metabolism in liver (Hart et al., 1992), although, the magnitude of CR-inducible changes is small (Lee et al., 1999). An even stronger alteration in gene expression may promote longer survival of subjects, as evident from correlated variation in transcript levels and life histories in mammals. Genes and biological processes reported in the study provide a valuable resource for examination of new candidate interventions that mimic gene expression changes associated with natural changes in lifespan.

Experimental procedures

Animal tissue collection and RNA extraction

The description and classification of mammals examined in the study is provided in Table S1. The 143 organ samples of 23 species were obtained from various sources. The collected species belong to Euungulata (domestic cattle, domestic goat, domestic boar, horse), Carnivora (domestic dog, domestic cat, Asian badger, American black bear), Chiroptera (greater tube-nosed bat, Brazilian free-tailed bat), Didelphimorphia (short-tailed opossum), Diprotodoncia (sugar glider), Lagomorpha (old world rabbit), Primate (vervet), Rodentia (spiny mouse, guinea pig, golden hamster, Mongolian gerbil, house mouse, white-footed mouse, Norway rat, Siberian chipmunk), and Soricomorpha (house shrew). All animals were young adults and, with the exception of horse and vervet, all were males. Additional RNA-seq libraries for liver, kidney, and brain of 10 species (Primate, Erinaceomorpha, Monotrema, and Bathyergidae sp.) were obtained from NCBI Gene Expression Omnibus. The experimental protocols were approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) of Ewha Womans University (No. 2011-03-038, 039, 062, 063 and 065) and Korea Research Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology (KRIBB-AEC-12005).

The organs examined in the study represent heterogeneous tissues whose structural and cellular composition varies among species. To account for this issue and maximize sample compatibility, major parts of each organ (covering different structures/cells) were dissected and homogenized prior to RNA extraction. Given that brain is a heterogeneous organ, we sampled prefrontal cortex/frontal lobe (Primate, Euungulata, Carnivora, Diprotodoncia, Didelphimorphia, Lagomorpha sp.) or entire brain except for olfactory bulb and cerebellum (Rodentia and Chiroptera sp.). Previous studies suggested that while the cortical regions substantially differ from the cerebellum in terms of gene expression (which we account for by our sampling procedure), different regions within the cerebral cortex show small expression variation (Khaitovich et al., 2004b). Immediately after sacrificing, liver, kidney,
and brain tissue samples were frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at 
−80 °C until further use. To ensure comparability of data derived from 
homologous organs between species, each organ was ground in liquid 
nitrogen-cooled mortar and used for RNA extraction. Most tissue 
samples were prepared in biological duplicates or triplicates to ensure 
biological variation in gene expression (Table S1). Total RNA was 
extracted using RNeasy kit Qiagen (Valencia, CA, USA) according to the 
manufacturer’s instructions. RNA integrity was assessed using an Agilent 
2100 Bioanalyzer (Lexington, MA, USA) prior to library construction.

RNA sequencing

Sequencing libraries were prepared using the mRNA-Seq Sample Prep Kit 
Illumina (San Diego, CA, USA) in accordance with the manufacturer’s 
instructions. Polyadenylated RNA was isolated using a poly-dT bead 
procedure, chemically fragmented, and randomly primed for reverse 
transcription. After second-strand synthesis, the ends of the double-
stranded complementary DNA were repaired. Following 3’-end adeny-
lation of these products, Illumina paired-end sequencing adapters were 
ligated to the blunt ends of the cDNA fragments. Ligated products were 
run on gels; 300-bp fragments were excised and then PCR-amplified (15 
cycles). After column purification, quality of the resulting libraries was 
assessed using Agilent 2100 Bioanalyzer. Sequencing was performed on 
the Illumina HiSeq2000 platform generating approximately 30 million 
reads per sample.

RNA-seq read mapping

Genome annotations (GTF) for 17 mammals with sequenced genomes 
were obtained from Ensembl, release 65. For the naked mole-rat 
(Heterocephalus glaber), long-tailed macaque (Macaca fascicularis), 
bonobo (Pan paniscus), and goat (Capra hircus), we used GTF 
annotations downloaded from NCBI database (Table S2). 51-bp 
paired-end reads that passed the chastity filter threshold were 
mapped using TopHat 2.0 (Trapnell et al., 2012) with default 
parameter values, except for distance between mature pairs (r = 200) 
and the number of allowable mismatches between read 
and genomic sequences (n = 3) to account for a possible genetic 
variability between study and database organisms. The anchor size (i.e. 
the minimum aligned length spanning each of the two exons that 
define a splice junction) was set at 8 bp, and we allowed one 
mismatch on the anchor region. We filtered the read alignments 
accepted by TopHat to remove mapping ambiguity. To do this, we 
extracted the best mapping(s) for each read, based on the number of 
mismatches in the alignment, and selected those reads for which the 
best mapping was unique. Depending on species, final efficiency of 
RNA-seq read alignments varied from 55 to 99% (Table S2). Average 
gene expression levels were calculated as FPKM and normalized using 
Cufflinks (Trapnell et al., 2012). An FPKM value of 3.0 was used to 
filter out low abundant transcripts.

De novo transcriptome assembly

Draft transcriptomes for 12 species were de novo assembled using Trinity 
(Grabherr et al., 2011). First, each RNA-seq reads set originating from 
individual biological repeat was assembled and analyzed individually (Fig. 
S4). As the Trinity assembler discards low coverage k-mers, no quality 
trimming of the reads was performed prior to the assembly. Trinity 
was run on the 51-bp paired-end sequences with the fixed default k-mer size 
of 25, minimum contig length of 200, paired fragment length of 500, 
and a butterfly heapspace of 25G (i.e. allocated memory). To remove 
redundancy, contigs that overlapped with a minimum length of 50 bp 
and minimum identity of 99% were merged using CAP3 (Huang & 
Madan, 1999) to form the organ-specific transcriptome assemblies. 
Finally, the assemblies from individual organs were collapsed with CAP3 
for the liver, kidney, and brain to form a united reference assembly 
(Table S3, Figs S1 and S4).

FPKM calculation for de novo transcriptomes

To calculate gene expression levels for de novo assembled transcripts, we 
developed a strategy combining ab initio proteome prediction, redunda-
cy elimination followed by FPKM calculation (Fig. S4). De novo 
transcriptomic contigs represent a mix of noncoding, partial, 
and complete cDNA sequences. The latter portion of molecules contains 
both start and stop signals and, therefore, can be treated as complete 
models in the ab initio protein prediction. We used AUGUSTUS v2.5 
software (Stanke et al., 2006) with default parameters optimized for 
eukaryote gene prediction to refine amino acid sequences encoded by 
reference transcriptome assemblies (Figs S2 and S4). Although de novo 
transcriptome assemblies were treated to eliminate redundant 
sequences, the ab initio predicted proteomes contained homologous 
sequences originating from software misassembly errors, highly homol-
gous cDNA sequences, and transcript isoforms. To filter out redundant 
amino acid sequences, we applied USEARCH v6.0 software (Edgar, 2010) 
with default parameters. The final sets of amino acid sequences were 
encoded by nonredundant longest transcripts expressed in the liver, 
kidney, or brain (Fig. S3). An overview of proteome characteristics is 
provided in Table S4 and additionally discussed in Supplementary 
Information. GTF gene model annotations produced by AUGUSTUS 
software were used for calculations of FPKM values using TopHat and 
Cufflinks as described above. The statistics on RNA-seq read alignments 
is provided in Table S2.

Definition of orthologous genes

We obtained sequence orthologous relationships for 17 mammals with 
sequenced genomes from Ensembl, version 65. We considered only 1–1 
orthologs in downstream analyses. Any other relationships like uncertain 
relationship due to the presence of paralogous sequences were excluded 
from the analysis. For ab initio predicted peptides and protein sets from 
the naked mole-rat (H. glaber), long-tailed macaque (M. fascicularis), 
bonobo (P. paniscus), and goat (C. hircus), we used INPARANOID v4.1 
software (Ostlund et al., 2009) with default parameters to refine initial 
1–1 relationships with Ensembl peptides (Fig. S4). The software 
predicted heterogeneous relationships with distinct species in rare cases. 
We applied strict thresholds based on overall prediction performance 
(P = 1, no multiple relationship was allowed) to filter out molecules with 
inconsistent relationships from the dataset (Fig. S4). The final dataset of 
orthologous groups (COGs) accounted for 19 643 individual groups of 
sequences (Table S5, Fig. S5). The list of COG referred in the study is 
provided in Dataset S6.

Expression level normalization

Initially, FPKM values of each sample were normalized against single 
reference sample individually using upper quartile normalization (Dillies 
et al., 2013). We then calculated log2 ratios centered on 0 for every pair 
of orthologs of two samples. The procedure was cyclically repeated for 
every combination of samples. The final expression values were
represented by a collection of log₂ ratios accounting for variation associated with normalization reference and biological variation between samples. Means and standardized quantiles derived from the distribution of FPKM were used in downstream analyses.

Data quality control
Because of the scale of the project and limitations in availability of tissue samples, some inherent biases were present in our data collection and analysis, so we acknowledge them. This includes de novo transcriptome assemblies for organisms for which no genome is currently available, as discussed above. In addition, organisms from published databases (primarily, Primates) were used in our analysis even though some of them featured difference in read length, sequencing platform, sex (we used males, whereas some database organisms were females), and occasional alignment to closely related genomes. Nevertheless, we found that the addition of these organisms to the pipeline improved our analysis. An analysis of traits is also less sensitive to issues with individual data points.

For further data quality control, we performed a series of statistical tests to filter out any poor quality samples from the analyses. We assessed intraspecies variation by examining CV defined as ratio of standard deviation to mean. Comparable degree of gene expression divergence among liver, kidney, and brain was observed, which did not exceed the value of CV = 0.6 and with mean values centered on CV = 0.05 (Fig. S23). The results indicated that measurement and sampling errors as well as biological differences contribute little additional variation and that much of interspecies variation was due to distinct sources of variation.

Normalized gene expression values were examined visually and by the K-S and Welch’s tests for any pair of organisms to ensure that resulting values were sampled from identical uniform distributions (Fig. S24). Any biological repeats with unusual deviation from homologous samples were excluded from the analysis. For RNA-seq libraries produced by previous studies (Brawand et al., 2011), we compared expression values with in-house data and examined CV to ensure that the downloaded data contained no instrumental or sampling errors (Fig. S25).

To verify the compatibility of FPKM calculated using conventional method (RNA-seq reads mapped to the genome) and FPKM calculated using de novo contigs, we assembled RNA transcripts using murine RNA-seq reads from liver, kidney, and brain. We inferred multiple orthologous relationships between ab initio predicted products with database sequences (excluding mouse database orthologs). We then calculated FPKM for liver, kidney, and brain and compared these values with FPKM produced from mouse genome alignments (Fig. S26). The analysis demonstrated no significant difference between FPKM produced by the two approaches (P = 1, K-S test) and minor additional variation introduced by two methods (Fig. S26).

Statistical analysis of gene expression and life histories
Analyses of gene expression and life histories were performed using OLS. Life-history variables (log_{10} ratio) were examined for nonrandom association with relative values of FPKM under assumption that the error follows Gaussian distribution:

\[ Y_i | x_1, x_2 = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \epsilon_i \sim N(0, \sigma^2 I_n) \]

where \( Y_i \) is the average response for gene \( i \), \( x_1 \) is the first explanatory variable, \( x_2 \) is the covariate predictor, \( \beta_0 \) is the intercept, \( \epsilon_i \) is the random error, \( I_n \) is an \( n \times n \) identity matrix, and \( \sigma^2 \) determines the variance of each observation.

OLS P-values (F-test) were then corrected with the Benjamini-Hochberg FDR-controlling procedure. We further used randomization test with \( n = 10^6 \) replications to ensure that observed significance exceed level that can be obtained by chance. Distribution of inter- and intraspecies expression variations were examined by Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks.

Primary accessions
Raw sequencing data and gene expression for 143 biological samples have been deposited in Gene Expression Omnibus under accession GSE43013. All RNA-seq read data have been deposited into the Short Read Archive database. Transcriptome shotgun assembly projects and contig annotations were deposited to DDBJ/EMBL/GenBank under the following accession numbers: PRJNA182762 (Chlorocebus aethiops), PRJNA182765 (Mecocricetus auratus), PRJNA182766 (M. leucogaster), PRJNA182767 (Meles meles), PRJNA182768 (Meriones unguiculatus), PRJNA182769 (Petaurus breviceps), PRJNA182770 (Pteropus lylei), PRJNA182771 (Suncus murinus), PRJNA182772 (Tadarida brasiliensis), PRJNA182773 (Ursus americanus), PRJNA182705 (Acomys cahirinus), PRJNA183188 (Tamias sibiricus).

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Conflict of interest
None declared.

References


Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s web-site.

Dataset S1. Statistically significant GO terms for genes whose expression variation associates with life history variation.

Dataset S2. Biological GO functions for genes whose expression variation associates with gestation period.

Dataset S3. Molecular GO functions for genes whose expression variation associates with gestation period.

Dataset S4. Statistically significant GO terms for genes whose expression variation associates with residual of life histories.

Dataset S5. GO functions for genes whose expression variation associates with residual of time to maturity.


Fig. S1 De novo assembled transcriptomic contigs.

Fig. S2 Ab initiño predicted peptides.

Fig. S3 Orthologous relationships inferred from ab initiño predicted peptides.

Fig. S4 Schematic representation of methods used for de novo transcriptome assembly, annotation and inferring of orthologous relationships.

Fig. S5 Cluster heat map that shows quantitative representation of orthologs in COG.

Fig. S6 Influence of measurement error on the λ model.

Fig. S7 Influence of non-constant evolution rate on the λ model.

Fig. S8 Overlap of genes whose expression variation associate with life histories.

Fig. S9 The diffusive model of transcriptome evolution.

Fig. S10 Distribution of transcripts with λ > 0.95 across gene expression levels.
Fig. S11 Macroevolution of gene expression modeled with the OU process.

Fig. S12 Summary on genes and models explaining interspecies expression variation.

Fig. S13 A cluster map that shows biological pathways associated with life histories.

Fig. S14 Genes encoding enzymes of carbohydrate degradation pathway are differentially expressed in liver.

Fig. S15 Gene expression variation associated with tryptophan metabolism in liver.

Fig. S16 Gene expression variation associated with lysine metabolism in liver.

Fig. S17 Gene expression variation associated with valine metabolism in liver.

Fig. S18 Gene expression variation associated with fatty acid metabolism in liver.

Fig. S19 Gene expression variation associated with the peroxisome proliferator pathway in liver.

Fig. S20 Gene expression variation associated with peroxisome negatively correlates with life history variation in liver.

Fig. S21 Gene expression variation associated with AMPK signaling negatively correlates with life history variation in liver.

Fig. S22 Overlap of genes whose expression variation associates with life histories and residuals.

Fig. S23 Within species FPKM variation.

Fig. S24 Normalization of liver RNA-seq samples.

Fig. S25 Variation between in-house and database RNA-seq data.

Fig. S26 Variation between FPKM produced from genomic and de novo contig RNA-seq read alignments.

Table S1 Classification and sampling sources of 33 mammals.

Table S3 Statistics on de novo assembled RNA contigs for 12 mammals.

Table S4 Characteristics of ab initio predicted coding sequences and peptides for 12 mammals.

Table S5 The numbers of orthologs in COG.

Table S6 Life histories of 33 mammals.

Table S7 Lambda parameter estimates and associated statistics for life histories.

Table S8 Statistics for genes whose expression variation is consistent with the BM model.

Table S9 Statistics for genes whose expression variation is consistent with the OU model.

Table S2 TopHat statistics on RNA-seq read alignments.