Physiological Characterization of an Anaerobic Ammonium-Oxidizing Bacterium Belonging to the “Candidatus Scalindua” Group

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The phylogenetic affiliation and physiological characteristics (e.g., $K_s$ and maximum specific growth rate [$\mu_{\text{max}}$]) of an anaerobic ammonium oxidation (anammox) bacterium, “Candidatus Scalindua sp.,” enriched from the marine sediment of Hiroshima Bay, Japan, were investigated. “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” exhibits higher affinity for nitrite and a lower growth rate and yield than the known anammox species.

An aerobic ammonium oxidation (anammox) is a microbial process in which ammonium is oxidized to nitrogen gas with nitrite as the electron acceptor under anoxic conditions (1–3). At least five candidate genera have been tentatively proposed in this taxon (4). The “Candidatus Scalindua” group is primarily found in marine environments (5–10). Previous studies indicate that “Candidatus Scalindua” contains taxonomically diverse members, while only a few members of the “Candidatus Scalindua” group have been successfully grown in enrichment cultures so far (11–15). Physiological characteristics of anammox bacteria affiliated to “Candidatus Scalindua” have been demonstrated only partially (11, 12, 16, 17) compared with the freshwater anammox bacteria (18–23). In this study, the phylogenetic affiliation and physiological characteristics of an anammox bacterium previously enriched from marine sediments of Hiroshima Bay, Japan, were determined.

Anaerobic batch experiments were performed to determine the following physiological parameters: (i) growth temperature, pH, and salinity ranges, (ii) inhibition by ammonium and nitrite, (iii) half-saturation constants ($K_s$) for nitrite and ammonium, (iv) accumulation and consumption of hydrazine after the addition of hydroxylamine, and (v) biomass yield. The maximum specific growth rate ($\mu_{\text{max}}$) and the ultrastructure of the anammox bacterium were also determined.

Biomass samples were obtained from a 7-liter membrane bioreactor (MBR) inoculated with anammox biofilms (13, 14) to obtain free-living anammox bacterial cells related to “Candidatus Scalindua.” Cells in the MBR were collected for fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH) and phylogenetic analyses, transmission electron microscopy (TEM), and anaerobic batch experiments. The detailed procedures are described in the supplemental material.

A single species of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” was successfully enriched in free-living cells (see Fig. S1 in the supplemental material) using the MBR in this study, where the anammox bacteria that hybridized with the Scal129b probe accounted for 88.8% ± 3.1% of all the bacteria. The partial sequences of the 16S rRNA gene from 83 clones were grouped into a single operational taxonomic unit (OTU) based on 97% sequence identity. Four nearly full-length 16S rRNA gene sequences from the OTU (99.7% identity among the four sequences) shared 96.9% to 97.0% identity with the sequence of “Candidatus Scalindua wagneri” (Fig. 1; see also Table S2 in the supplemental material). Such low sequence similarity suggests that the members of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” are affiliated with a different anammox species in the “Candidatus Scalindua” lineage. The cellular structure of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” has shown three separate compartments that include electron-dense particles and no pilus-like appendages (Fig. 2), as reported by van Niftrik et al. (24, 25).

Table 1 summarizes the physiological characteristics of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” and other anammox bacteria (10, 12, 18–23). The detailed procedures are described in the supplemental material.
The optimal temperature and pH ranges of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” (10 to 30°C and pH 6.0 to 8.5, respectively) (Fig. 3A and B) were lower than those of other anammox species (i.e., 15 to 45°C and pH 6.5 to 9.0, respectively) (10, 12, 19, 23, 26). Anammox activities of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” were observed under conditions of 0.8% to 4.0% salinity, whereas no activity was detected in the absence of salinity. This outcome indicates that “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” is a halophilic bacterium. “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” accumulated hydrazine after the spike addition of hydroxylamine (see Fig. S2 in the supplemental material), which is a phenomenon commonly observed in the known anammox bacteria (12, 18, 21, 23).

The $K_s$ values for nitrite and ammonium of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” (Table 1; see also Fig. S3 in the supplemental material) were lower than those of other anammox bacteria, suggesting that the high affinity for nitrite is necessary for the bacteria survive in marine environments with extremely low levels of nitrite concentrations. Indeed, the ammonium, nitrite, and nitrate concentrations at the sediment sampling point (the sediment was used as the inoculum in this study) were 17.8, 2.1, and 5.7 μM, respectively.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth temp (°C)</td>
<td>10–30</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td>20–43</td>
<td>25–37</td>
<td>15–45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Growth pH</td>
<td>6.0–8.5</td>
<td>7.0–8.8</td>
<td>6.7–8.3</td>
<td>6.5–9.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
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<td>Growth salinity (%) or level of salinity (mmol)</td>
<td>1.5–4.0</td>
<td>&lt;3</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>200 mmol (chloride)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biomass yield (mmol C [mmol N]$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$K_s$ for ammonium (μM)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28 ± 4</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$K_s$ for nitrite (μM)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>86 ± 4</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>0.2–3</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation energy (kJ mol$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>81.4 ± 3</td>
<td>56 ± 3</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protein content of biomass (g protein [g VSS]$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
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<tr>
<td>$μ_{max}$ (h$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>0.0020</td>
<td>0.0041</td>
<td>0.0027</td>
<td>0.0026–0.0035</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
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<td>Tolerance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nitrite (mM)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>&lt;16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13, 25</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammonium (mM)</td>
<td>&gt;16</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
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FIG 2 Transmission electron micrographs of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” enriched in the MBR, showing the cells which were about to be divided. All cells in panels A and B were divided into three separate compartments by individual membranes: the paryphoplasm, the riboplasm, and the anammoxosome compartments. In panel A, all cells were occupied by the voluminous anammoxosome. In panel B, the white arrows indicate condensed and electron-dense particles. Scale bars, 500 nm.
“Candidatus Scalindua sp.” enriched from the sediment of Hiroshima Bay, Japan, were investigated. This microorganism is a halophilic bacterium and exhibits higher affinity for nitrite and a lower growth rate than the known anammox species. “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” could maintain its anammox activity under low-temperature conditions. These physiological characteristics support the idea of the predominance of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.” in marine sediments. The findings contribute to our understanding of the niche adaptation of “Candidatus Scalindua sp.”

Nucleotide sequence accession numbers. The 16S-23S rRNA gene sequence data were deposited in the GenBank/EMBL/DBJ databases under accession numbers AB811945 to AB811948.

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REFERENCES


