

# Isolation and Sequence Analysis of Transcription Factor GmWRKY53 from Soybean (*Glycine max*)

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**Abstract:** The WRKY protein is a super family of transcription factors unique to plants which was so named as all family members contain a conserved amino acid sequence WRKYGQK and special zinc finger motif at its N-terminal end. WRKY protein may participate in regulating the expression of a wide range of genes involved in various biological processes such as development, metabolism and response to a range of abiotic and biotic stresses. We characterized a predicated transcription factor GmWRKY53 from soybean using the yeast one hybrid system with the bait vector which had W-box of the *AtNPR1* (*Arabidopsis thaliana*) promoter related with pathogen defense. It contained one conserved domain, and showed similarity with AtWRKY family members in both overall amino-acid sequences and the secondary structure arrangement within the DNA-binding motifs. In yeast one-hybrid system, GmWRKY53 can specially activate the genes fused with the promoter containing W-box of the *AtNPR1* promoter. The study on transcription factor WRKY of soybean is conducted to understand the regulation of various physiological programs of soybean, including pathogen defense, senescence and development.

**Keywords:** Transcription factor; WRKY; W-box; Soybean

## 大豆转录因子 GmWRKY53 的分离及序列分析

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**摘 要:** WRKY 蛋白是只存在于植物中的一类转录因子家族, 由 WRKY 蛋白 N 端高度保守的 WRKYGQK 氨基酸序列及特殊的锌指结构而命名。WRKY 除参与植物发育和代谢的调控外还与植物的抗逆反应有关。本研究利用抗病相关基因 *NPR1* 基因启动子区的 W-box 顺式元件采用酵母单杂交方法, 以拟南芥 *AtNPR1* 启动子区域 W-box 元件构建诱饵载体, 从大豆中分离到了一个转录因子 GmWRKY53, 通过序列分析表明, GmWRKY53 具有与 AtWRKY 蛋白的保守氨基酸序列极相似的二级结构, 在酵母单杂交系统中该蛋白能够与抗病相关基因 *AtNPR1* 基因启动子区的 W-box 特异结合并启动报道基因的表达。对大豆 WRKY 转录因子的研究有助于深入理解大豆抗病及发育调控机制。

**关键词:** 转录因子; WRKY; W-box; 大豆

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### 1 Introduction

Transcriptional control of the stress-related genes is a crucial part of the plant development and response to stresses<sup>[1]</sup>. Transcription factors can interact with cis-regulatory sequences of target genes to regulate gene expression temporally and spatially<sup>[2]</sup>. Much more attentions had been paid to identify transcription factors that involved in plant development regulation and stres-

ses response which related to agricultural production and quality<sup>[3]</sup>. WRKY transcription factors are one of the largest families of transcriptional regulators in plants and was so named because all family members contain a conserved amino acid sequence WRKYGQK at its N-terminal end. It contains zinc-finger-like motif which is able to bind specifically to the DNA sequence motif W-box “(T)(T)TGAC(T/C)”<sup>[4]</sup>. WRKY proteins often act as repressors or activators and play an

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important role in the regulation of transcriptional reprogramming associated with plant stress responses<sup>[5-8]</sup>. Sometimes, they also exhibit extensive auto-regulation and cross-regulation in a dynamic process with built-in redundancy<sup>[5]</sup>. *Arabidopsis* WRKY18, WRKY40 and WRKY60 transcription factors interact both physically and functionally in plant defense responses. However, they may play different roles in modulating gene expression in plant abiotic stress response<sup>[9]</sup>. To date, many WRKY proteins have been identified which were involved in the defense against stress. Northern blotting analysis revealed that 10 of 13 *OsWRKY* genes responded to NaCl, PEG, cold or heat treatments differentially<sup>[10]</sup>. In wheat, overexpression of *TaWRKY19* conferred tolerance to salt, drought and freezing stresses in transgenic plants. *TaWRKY2* enhanced expression of STZ and RD29B, and bound to their promoters<sup>[11]</sup>. Berri et al<sup>[12]</sup> defined the existence of nine *OsWRKY* gene clusters comprising both phylogenetically related and unrelated genes that were significantly co-expressed, suggested that specific sets of *WRKY* genes might act in co-regulatory networks. *Arabidopsis*, dicot model organism, is commonly used to predict novel genes biological functions in plants<sup>[13]</sup>. *AtWRKY40* and *AtWRKY63* were particularly involved in regulating the expression of genes responding commonly to both mitochondrial and chloroplast dysfunction. This study establishes the role of WRKY transcription factors in the coordination of stress-responsive genes encoding mitochondrial and chloroplast proteins<sup>[14]</sup>. Soybean is one of the most important economic crops in the world, genome and transcriptome sequencing of soybean have been completed<sup>[15]</sup>. Moreover, a total of 133 *WRKY* members in the soybean genome were identified and could be classified into three groups (groups I, II and III) according to structural features of their encoded proteins. Some of these genes have been extensively studied and reported to be involved in many physiological and biochemical processes<sup>[16]</sup>. Zhou et al<sup>[17]</sup> used a transgenic approach to investigate three *WRKY* genes of soybean, the results indicated that they play differential roles in abiotic stress tolerance, moreover, one of them may have function in both lateral root development and the abiotic stress response. Lou et al<sup>[18]</sup> found that *GsWRKY20*, a gene of wild soybean, could enhance plant drought tolerance through regulating

ABA signalling. Soybean is one of the most important crops for food production. However, frequent occurrences of drought or stress events have negatively impacts on soybean growth and production. Therefore, it is important to isolate or elucidate molecular mechanisms of crucial factors in soybean adaptation to stress. In this study, we characterized a predicted WRKY53 transcription factor from soybean using the yeast one hybrid system by the bait vector which had W-box in the *NPR1* promoter related with pathogen defense. By applying current knowledge of stress-regulated WRKYs, their regulatory networks and crosstalk in abiotic stress responses were discussed.

## 2 Materials and methods

## 2.1 Materials

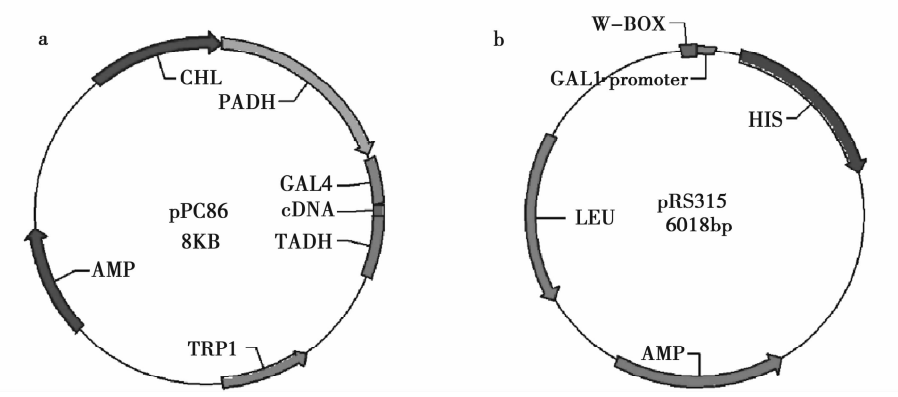
Soybean (*Glycine max*) cv. Williams 82 was used to construct soybean cDNAs library. Yeast strain *yWAM2* (Leu<sup>-</sup>, His<sup>-</sup>, Trp<sup>-</sup>), *E. coli* Rosetta, *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* strain *LB44404*, vectors pRS315His (Leu<sup>+</sup>), YepGAP(Trp<sup>+</sup>) were all reserved in our lab. The Y1H screening was performed following protocols as described previously<sup>[19]</sup>.

## 2.2 Construction of soybean cDNA library and yeast one-hybrid screening

[illegible]

synthesized and used for constructing of the rescue vector pRSmW-box (Leu + ). Before yeast transformation, constructs with inserts were selected by PCR using primers derived from the vector primers and sequenced using the same primers. For the one-hybrid library screening, the cDNA library were cotransformed in competent yeast cells (pRSW-box contained) and the resulting cells were plated on the appropriate selective medium. 50  $\mu$ L plasmid of pre-made cDNA library were transformed into yeast compenent cells(pRSW-

box contained ): 240  $\mu$ L PEG ( 50% w/v ), 36  $\mu$ L 1.0M LiAc, 25  $\mu$ L ss-DNA(2.0 mg $\cdot$ mL<sup>-1</sup>). Incubated at 30 $^{\circ}$ C for 30 min, 42 $^{\circ}$ C for 45 min. After slow rotation(7 000 r $\cdot$ min<sup>-1</sup>) 15 s, the yeast cells were harvested, resuspended in 1 mL dH<sub>2</sub>O and spreaded on plates with selective media (Leu - , His - , Trp - ) as well as media (Leu - , His - ). Library plasmids were isolated from positive colonies which survived on selective media (Leu - , His - , Trp - ) and the genes interacted with W-box were amplified.



a: Indicates schematic illustration of the vector used in cDNA library construction (pPC86-cDNA) ;  
b: Indicates schematic illustration of the vector used in bait vector construction (pRS315-W-box).

Fig. 1 Schematic illustration of the vectors

2.3 Isolation of WRKY cDNA

According to BD SMART RACE protocols, 3  $\mu$ g of total RNA from soybean were prepared for 3' and 5' cDNA amplification. 3' GSP1 primer (5'-GCCAAGTC-CAAGCGGCAG-3') and 5' GSP1 primer (5'-CGC TGCCGCTTGACTTCG-3') were designed according to the cDNA fragments obtained by yeast one-hybrid screening. 5'-RACE and 3'-RACE were performed to achieve full-length cDNA using BD SMART RACE kit (Clontech, Japan). The nucleotide sequence was determined by overlapping clones and confirmed by a full-length cDNA clone.

2.4 Target DNA sequencing and phylogenetic analysis

DNA sequences were determined using the Taq Dye Primer Cycle Sequencing Kit (Amersham) and the ABI 373A automatic sequencer. The sequence was compared and analyzed with the non-redundant database at the National Centre of Biotechnology (NCBI) using BLAST program. Sequence alignment between WRKY and its plant homologs was performed by using ClustalW2 software ( <http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/msa/clustalw2/> ). WRKY homologs in other higher

plants were used for phylogenetic analysis by the neighbor-joining method with aid of MEGA v3.1 software.

2.5 Activation analysis of GmWRKY53

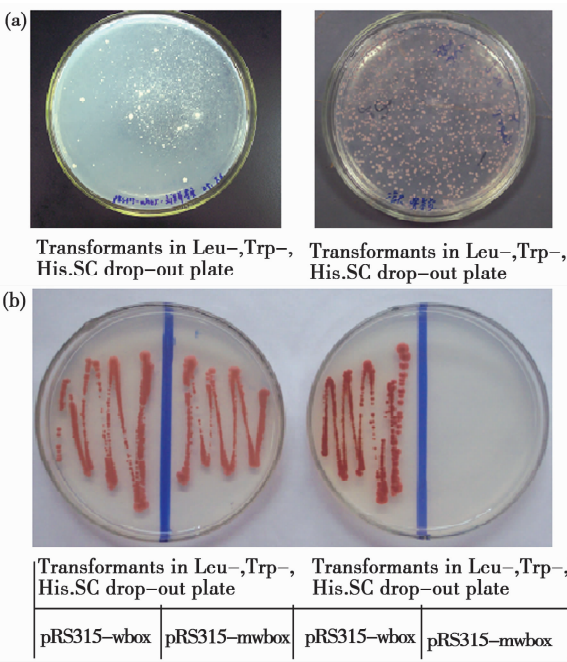
To detect activation of *GmWRKY53* in yeast, DNAs of pRSW-box and pPC86-*GmWRKY53* were co-transformed into the yeast cells, and cultured on the synthetic complete drop-out medium (Trp - , Leu - , His - ) to determine the function of *GmWRKY53*.

3 Results and analysis

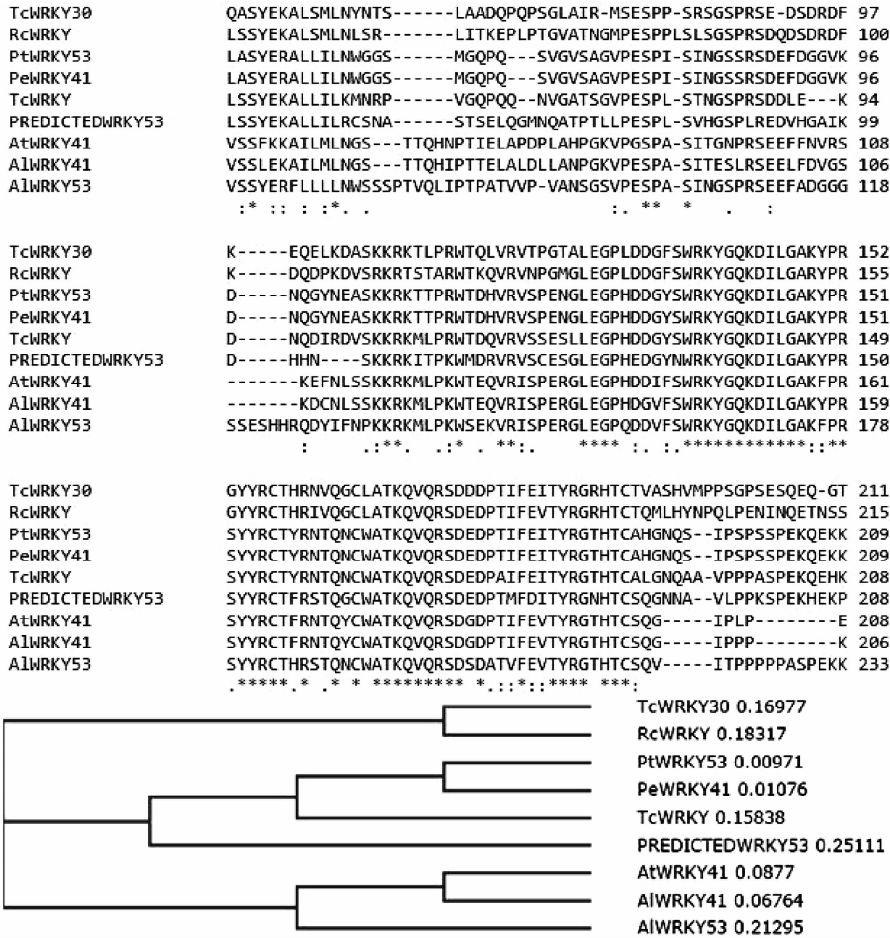
3.1 Isolation and characterization of WRKY protein from soybean

To isolate WRKY which binded with W-boxing in the promoter of *AtNPR1* gene, a soybean root cDNA library with 90% of recombinants was constructed. The results showed that the library contained more than 5.0  $\times 10^6$  clones and the inserts was over 1.2 kb on average. Based on the W-box motif of *AtNPR1* promoter, 3  $\times$  W-box were introduced into the bait vector pRS315His (Leu + ) for screening the cDNA library. Four positive clones were isolated, which survived well on the synthetic complete drop-out medium (His - , Trp - , Leu - ) (Fig. 2a).

Sequence analysis showed all of them contained WRKY domain and one of them was full-length gene containing 1 020 bp nucleotides encoding 340 amino acids. A BLAST search against GenBank revealed that this protein contained one conserved DNA binding domain of 56 amino acids that matched the probable WRKY transcription factor 53 of soybean named as GmWRKY53 (Fig. 3). Amino acid sequence analysis showed that GmWRKY53 had one WRKY domain with a FLY-WCH-type zinc finger-containing protein. A homology search of GenBank databases showed that GmWRKY53 has 57.6% similarity with PtWRKY53 protein (*Populus trichocarpa*) as well as 56.4% similarity with PeWRKY41 (*Populus euphratica*). However, when compared with AtWRKYs, GmWRKY53 showed lower similarity of 41.8%. We also carried out a systematic phylogenetic analysis between GmWRKY53 and the other 8 WRKY proteins from different species using the ClustalW2 program. The 9 proteins were approximately divided into 3 groups (Fig. 3), suggesting that the functional of WRKY transcription factors manifestly diversified in evolution.



a: Indicates, grown on the drop-out plate (Trp<sup>-</sup>, Leu<sup>-</sup>) and the drop-out plate (His<sup>-</sup>, Trp<sup>-</sup>, Leu<sup>-</sup>) by screening; b: Indicates yeast cells carrying the wild type (W-box) or the mutated W-box (mW-box) sequence were transformed and grown on drop-out plate.



**Fig. 3 The amino acid sequence of GmWRKY53 was aligned against WRKYs from different species with ClustalW2 software**

### 3.2 GmWRKY53 specifically binds to W-box

In order to validate the specific combination of protein-DNA interactions, yeast reporter cells were transformed with pPC86-*GmWRKY53* and pRSW-box. The cells survived well on the synthetic complete drop-out medium (His<sup>-</sup>, Trp<sup>-</sup>, Leu<sup>-</sup>) indicating that the *GmWRKY53* protein could bound to W-box and activate expression of HIS3. For further confirmation of the association between *GmWRKY53* and W-box, the mutated version (3 × mW-box) were cloned into the bait vector pRS315His (Leu<sup>+</sup>). As a result, yeast reporter cells contained *GmWRKY53* and 3 × mW-box could not survive on the drop-out medium (His<sup>-</sup>, Trp<sup>-</sup>, Leu<sup>-</sup>) (Fig. 2b, right panel), indicating that *GmWRKY53* could bind to the W-box element in yeast specifically.

## 4 Conclusion and discussion

Many previous studies have shown that WRKY TFs are involved in process of responding to biotic and abiotic stresses in soybean. Researches demonstrated that *GmWRKY13*, *GmWRKY21*, *GmWRKY54*<sup>[17]</sup> and *GsWRKY20*<sup>[18]</sup>, participated in salt stress, cold stress and drought tolerance or other biotic stress responses. This will not only bring an exciting foreground for plant genetic engineering of stress tolerance, but also provide new gene targets for marker-assisted selection. To isolate *WRKY* genes from soybean, yeast one-hybrid method was used with 3 × W-box as a bait and one full-length gene was obtained from a soybean root cDNA library, four positive clones containing WRKY domain have been fetched and *GmWRKY53* have been cloned. The results showed *GmWRKY53* coding a WRKY protein with a FLYWCH-type zinc finger domain. A homology search of GenBank databases showed that *GmWRKY53* has 40.49% similarity with *AtWRKY53* protein (*Arabidopsis lyrata* subsp. *lyrata*). Hu et al<sup>[20]</sup> found that *AtWRKY53* accompanied with *AtWRKY46*, *AtWRKY70* involved in SA-signaling pathway and demonstrated negative cross-regulation resistance to *P. syringae* among these three genes. These results indicate that WRKY protein plays overlapping and synergetic roles in plant basal defense. To further confirm the binding specificity between *GmWRKY53* and W-box, the W-box sequence was modified and cloned into the bait vector pRS315His. As a result, yeast reporter cells could not survive on the drop-out medium (His<sup>-</sup>, Trp<sup>-</sup>, Leu<sup>-</sup>) (Fig. 1b, right panel). NPR1 is a key transcriptional co-regulator

in plant defense responses. It promotes efficient expression of defense response genes following infection and prevents spurious activation of defensive responses in the absence of infection<sup>[21]</sup>. A large body of evidence indicates that WRKY transcription factors increase the expression levels of the *NPR1* gene in the defense response<sup>[22]</sup>. Considering the W-box was referred to the *AtNPR1* promoter, we speculate it might play an important role in the *AtNPR1*-regulated pathway. However, more experiments are needed to test this hypothesis. Furthermore, Tripathi et al<sup>[23]</sup> found that NaCl stress led to inducibility of responsive soybean *GmWRKY53* promoter as well as ABA and JA treatments utilizing tobacco Bright Yellow 2 (BY-2) cell system. Taken together, these results indicated that *GmWRKY53* gene may play an important role in plants during abiotic stress. However, the regulation mechanism of the defense response mediated by WRKY transcription factors is fairly complex, and further research is needed.

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点开发和性状的分子标记选择提供了重要信息,为分子标记辅助育种奠定基础。

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