

**Pathogenicity of a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus,
A/chicken/Yamaguchi/7/04 (H5N1) in different
species of birds and mammals**

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Summary. Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) have been occurring in domestic poultry in Asia since 1996. In the beginning of 2004, HPAI outbreaks were caused by H5N1 virus in two farms and a group of pet chickens in different areas of Japan. In the present study, the pathogenicity of A/chicken/Yamaguchi/7/04 (H5N1), which had been isolated from a dead chicken during the first outbreak in Japan, was assessed in chickens, quails, budgerigars, ducklings, mice, and miniature pigs by experimental infection. The virus was highly pathogenic to all the birds tested. Mice were susceptible to infection with a low mortality rate and miniature pigs were resistant to infection with the virus.

Introduction

A wide variety of species of birds and mammals are susceptible to influenza A virus infection. Viruses of all 16 hemagglutinin (HA) (H1–H16) and 9 neuraminidase (N1–N9) subtypes have been isolated from avian species [1, 6]. Aquatic birds are the natural reservoirs of influenza A viruses [12]. Influenza viruses are perpetuated in nature by continuing to circulate in migratory ducks and frozen lake water [9]. Based on the severity of the disease they cause in chickens, avian influenza viruses are divided into two groups, highly pathogenic and low pathogenic [1]. Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) viruses replicate in limited tissues where host proteases such as trypsin-like enzymes are found. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses possess inserted multiple basic amino acid residues at the site of cleavage of their HAs into HA1 and HA2 by ubiquitous proteases such

as furin and PC6 [8, 25]. This cleavage confers infectivity to a greater number of tissues, leading to a severe systemic disease, characterized by high mortality [14]. The HPAI viruses are restricted to subtypes H5 and H7, and viruses of these two subtypes had been believed to be low pathogenic in the reservoir host, ducks, until HPAI H5N1 viruses were isolated from bar-headed geese, brown-headed gulls, and black-headed gulls, 2005, in China [4, 16].

Outbreaks of HPAI in poultry such as chickens and quails around the world have caused high mortality and substantial economic losses, thereby impacting negatively on the poultry industry [1, 27]. Outbreaks have occurred often in the last decade in North America, Europe, and Asia. In Asia, highly pathogenic H5N1 influenza viruses have been recognized since 1996 [28]. In 1997, HPAI viruses were directly transmitted from birds to humans in Hong Kong, signaling the necessity to clarify the ecology of avian influenza virus [26]. HPAI outbreaks again occurred during 2001–2002 in Hong Kong [24]. In 2004, HPAI outbreaks also occurred in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Laos, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam [15]. The HPAI virus, A/chicken/Yamaguchi/7/04 (H5N1), isolated in Japan, 2004, was lethal to chickens [18]. The pathogenicity of this HPAI virus in birds other than chickens and in mammals is not known. In order to determine the pathogenicity of the virus in chickens, quails, budgerigars, ducklings, mice, and miniature pigs, and to compare the pathogenicity of this HPAI virus in those animals in parallel with that of other H5N1 influenza viruses, experimental infection was carried out in the present study.

Materials and methods

Viruses

Influenza virus strain A/chicken/Yamaguchi/7/04 (H5N1) (Ck/Yamaguchi/04) was isolated from a dead chicken during the first outbreak of HPAI in Japan and was provided by the National Institute of Animal Health (Ibaraki, Japan) [18]. A/duck/Yokohama/aq-10/03 (H5N1) (Dk/Yokohama/03), isolated from duck meat imported from China, was provided by the Animal Quarantine service (Kanagawa, Japan) [13, 19]. R(A/duck/Mongolia/54/01-A/duck/Mongolia/47/01) (H5N1) (R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong)) was a reassortant virus generated from A/duck/Mongolia/54/01 (H5N2) and A/duck/Mongolia/47/01 (H7N1) which were isolated in our laboratory from fecal samples of wild ducks in Mongolia [13]. These three viruses were propagated in 10-day-old embryonated chicken eggs for 48 h at 35 °C. The infectious allantoic fluid was used as inoculum for experimental infections of animals and for the preparation of purified virus.

Animals

Chickens (*Gallus gallus*), quails (*Coturnix japonica*), budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), ducklings (*Anas platyrhynchos*), mice (*Mus musculus*), and miniature pigs (*Sus scrofa domestica*) were used for the experimental infection study. Specific pathogen-free white leghorn chickens were hatched and raised for four weeks in our laboratory. One-month-old quails and three-month-old budgerigars were purchased from pet shops. Three-day-old ducklings were purchased from a duck farm in Hokkaido, Japan. Six-week-old female BALB/c mice and two-month-old specific pathogen-free male miniature pigs were purchased from Japan SLC, Inc. (Shizuoka, Japan) and Nippon Institute for Biological Science (Yamanashi, Japan).

Animal experiments

Viruses were inoculated intranasally, at a 50% egg infectious dose (EID₅₀) of 10^{8.0}, into birds and mammals. For the birds and miniature pigs, 0.1 ml of each H5N1 virus containing 10^{8.0}EID₅₀ was inoculated intranasally. For the mice, 0.03 ml of each H5N1 virus containing 10^{8.0}EID₅₀ was inoculated intranasally. As a negative control, phosphate buffered saline (PBS) was given to the birds and mammals as much volume as the virus suspension. Birds and mice were sacrificed at 3 and 14 days post-infection (p.i.). When animals were dead or sacrificed, trachea and lung (respiratory organs), liver, spleen, kidneys, colon, brain, heart, pancreas, and blood of each animal were collected aseptically and were used for the titration of virus and histopathological examination. For miniature pigs, nasal swabs were collected in minimal essential medium daily from day 1 p.i. to day 7 p.i., and were used for the titration of virus. Animals were housed in self-contained isolator units (Tokiwa Kagaku, Tokyo, Japan) at a BSL 3 biosafety facility at the Graduate School of Veterinary Medicine, Hokkaido University, Japan.

Virus titration

The tissue homogenates from birds and mice were inoculated into 10-day-old embryonated chicken eggs and incubated for 48 h at 35 °C. The titers of virus were calculated by the method of Reed and Muench [22] and expressed as the EID₅₀ per gram of tissue. Viral titers of the nasal swab samples of the miniature pigs were calculated as the 50% tissue culture infectious dose (TCID₅₀) per ml for swab in MDCK cells.

Antibody detection

Serum samples treated with beta-propiolactone (Wako Pure Chemicals Industries, Ltd., Japan) at 37 °C for 3 h were examined for the presence of antibodies against H5 influenza virus by ELISA. The purified R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) (H5N1) virus was used as antigen for ELISA according to Kida et al. [10]. ELISA titers were expressed as reciprocals of serum dilutions.

Histopathological examination

The tissues of birds and mammals were fixed in 20% formalin in PBS (pH 7.2), sectioned, and stained with hematoxylin and eosin for microscopic examination. For the detection of influenza virus antigens in the tissues, all the sections were stained using the streptavidin-biotin immunoperoxidase complex method (Histofine SAB-PO[®] kit, Nichirei Corp., Tokyo) with rabbit anti-A/duck/Pennsylvania/10218/84 (H5N2) hyperimmune serum at a 1:1,000 dilution as the primary antibody.

Results

Chickens

All of the chickens inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 died on day 2 and between day 2 p.i. and day 4 p.i. (2–4d), respectively, and virus was recovered from each of the tissues tested (respiratory organs, liver, kidneys, colon, and brain) (Table 1). Higher titers of viruses were detected in four of the five tissues of chickens inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 than in those with Dk/Yokohama/03. None of the chickens inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) had died by day 14 p.i., and virus was not recovered from any of the tissues at

Table 1. Virus recovery and antibody response from chickens inoculated with avian influenza virus

Inoculated virus	No. of animals	Days p.i.	Virus recovery ^a	Antibody response ^b						
				Respiratory organs	Liver	Kidneys	Colon	Brain	Blood	
Ck/Yamaguchi/04 (H5N1)	6	2d	dead	6 (8.4)	6 (7.4)	6 (7.6)	6 (7.3)	6 (7.1)	ND ^c	ND
Dk/Yokohama/03 (H5N1)	5	2–4d	dead	5 (7.1)	5 (5.8)	5 (6.4)	5 (5.8)	5 (7.7)	ND	ND
R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) (H5N1)	3	3d	sacrificed	1 (6.8)	1 (6.5)	1 (7.2)	1 (7.2)	1 (8.0)	1 (7.3)	–
	3	3d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	0	–
	3	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	0	–

^aDigit: number of animals in which each virus was isolated. Parenthesis: average of virus titers (logEID₅₀/g). 0 indicates no virus was isolated from animals

^bAntibody detection was examined by ELISA. –: ELISA titer was below 40

^cNot determined

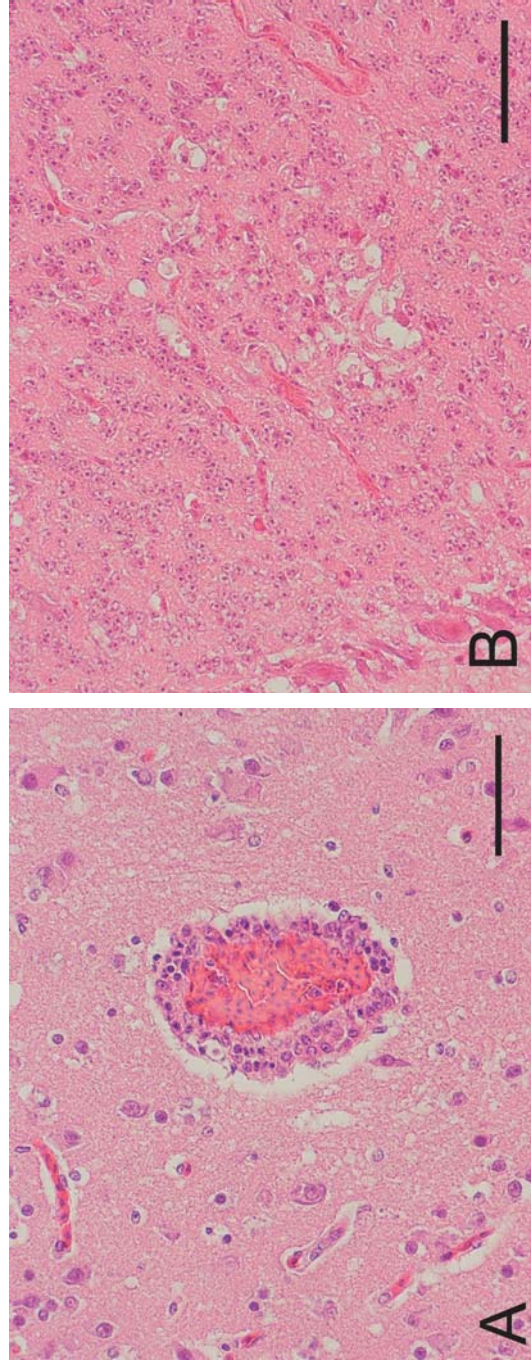


Fig. 1. Histopathological examination in chickens (A) and quails (B) inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03. Photomicrographs of hematoxylin and eosin-stained tissue sections. **A:** Perivascular cuffing, swelling of endothelial cells, infiltration and proliferation of microglia in the brain (cerebrum) of the chickens inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03 on day 4 p.i. **B:** Lamellar encephalomalacia (necrosis) in the brain (cerebellum) of the quails inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03 on day 4 p.i. Bar, 50 μ m

days 3 and 14 p.i. Sero-conversion to H5 influenza virus was not detected in any birds, indicating that the chickens were not infected with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong). In the histopathological examination, influenza virus antigens were detected in the brain, liver, spleen, kidneys, heart, lungs, pancreas, and colon of chickens inoculated either with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 or with Dk/Yokohama/03. Since severe virus encephalitis with perivascular infiltration in the brain affected one chicken inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03 (Fig. 1A) and higher titers were detected in the brains of chickens inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03 than with Ck/Yamaguchi/04, it was found that infection with Dk/Yokohama/03 caused severer lesions than infection with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 in the brain.

Quails

All of the quails inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 died between day 2 p.i. and day 3 p.i. (2–3d) and between day 3 p.i. and day 4 p.i. (3–4d), respectively, and virus was recovered from each of the tissues tested (Table 2). Disease signs characterized by severe nervous disorders were observed in 2 out of 6 quails infected with Dk/Yokohama/03. Higher titers of viruses were detected in all the tissues of quails inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 compared to those inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03. None of the quails inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) had died by day 14 p.i., and virus was not recovered from any of the tissues at day 3 and 14 p.i. Sero-conversion to H5 influenza virus was detected in the quails inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) at day 14 p.i., indicating that these quails were infected with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong). In the histopathological examination, in the brain of the quail inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03, severe virus encephalitis with laminar encephalomalacia (necrosis) was observed (Fig. 1B). Antigens to influenza viruses were detected in the brains and hearts of birds infected either with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 or with Dk/Yokohama/03.

Budgerigars

All of the budgerigars inoculated either with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 or with Dk/Yokohama/03 died by day 5 p.i., and the virus was recovered from each of the tissues tested (Table 3). Disease signs such as severe nervous disorders were observed in 3 out of 7 budgerigars infected with Dk/Yokohama/03. None of the budgerigars inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) had died by day 14 p.i., and virus was not recovered from any of the tissues at days 3 and 14 p.i. Sero-conversion to H5 influenza virus was not detected in any budgerigars inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) at day 14 p.i., indicating that the budgerigars were not infected with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong).

Ducklings

Two of the ducklings inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 died on day 6 p.i. and day 7 p.i. (6–7d), and virus was recovered from each of the tissues including

Table 2. Virus recovery and antibody response from quails inoculated with avian influenza virus

Inoculated virus	No. of animals	Days p.i.	Status	Virus recovery ^a							Antibody response ^b
				Respiratory organs	Liver	Kidneys	Colon	Brain	Blood		
Ck/Yamaguchi/04 (H5N1)	7	2–3d	dead	7 (7.4)	7 (7.1)	7 (8.8)	7 (7.2)	7 (8.4)	ND ^c	ND	
Dk/Yokohama/03 (H5N1)	4	3–4d	dead	4 (6.8)	4 (4.4)	2 (5.7)	3 (6.4)	4 (8.3)	ND	ND	
R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) (H5N1)	2	3d	sacrificed	1 (7.2)	2 (6.0)	2 (8.0)	0	1 (5.8)	1 (3.8)	–	
	3	3d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	0	–	
	2	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	

^aDigit: number of animals in which each virus was isolated. Parenthesis: average of virus titers (logEID₅₀/g). 0 indicates no virus was isolated from animals

^bAntibody detection was examined by ELISA. –: ELISA titer was below 40. +: ELISA titer was over 40

^cNot determined

Table 3. Virus recovery and antibody response from budgerigars inoculated with avian influenza virus

Inoculated virus	No. of animals	Days p.i.		Virus recovery ^a					Antibody response ^b
				Respiratory organs	Liver	Kidneys	Colon	Brain	
Ck/Yamaguchi/04 (H5N1)	7	3–4d	dead	7 (6.6)	7 (4.3)	7 (7.1)	3 (3.8)	7 (7.4)	ND ^c
Dk/Yokohama/03 (H5N1)	4	3d	sacrificed	4 (5.0)	3 (3.5)	4 (5.4)	4 (2.9)	4 (6.2)	ND
	3	5d	dead	3 (5.3)	3 (2.6)	3 (4.9)	2 (2.9)	3 (8.0)	ND
R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) (H5N1)	3	3d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	ND
	3	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	–

^aDigit: number of animals in which each virus was isolated. Parenthesis: average of virus titers (logEID₅₀/g). 0 indicates no virus was isolated from animals

^bAntibody detection was examined by ELISA. –: ELISA titer was below 40

^cNot determined

Table 4. Virus recovery and antibody response from ducklings inoculated with avian influenza virus

Inoculated virus	No. of animals	Days p.i.		Virus recovery ^a					Antibody response ^b
				Respiratory organs	Liver	Kidneys	Colon	Brain	
Ck/Yamaguchi/04 (H5N1)	3	3d	sacrificed	3 (5.8)	3 (5.3)	3 (5.2)	3 (3.0)	0	–
	2	6–7d	dead	2 (3.9)	1 (5.5)	1 (5.7)	1 (2.5)	1 (5.3)	ND ^c
	1	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	+
Dk/Yokohama/03 (H5N1)	6	3–4d	dead	6 (7.1)	6 (7.1)	6 (5.7)	6 (4.7)	6 (8.1)	ND
R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) (H5N1)	3	3d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	–
	3	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	+

^aDigit: number of animals in which each virus was isolated. Parenthesis: average of virus titers (logEID₅₀/g). 0 indicates no virus was isolated from animals

^bAntibody detection was examined by ELISA. –: ELISA titer was below 40. +: ELISA titer was over 40

^cNot determined

the brain (Table 4). One of the ducklings survived for 14 days, and from this duckling, specific serum antibodies against H5 influenza virus were detected. All of the ducklings inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03 died between day 3 p.i. and day 4 p.i. (3–4d), and the virus was recovered from each tissue. None of the ducklings inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) had died by day 14 p.i., and virus was not recovered from any of the tissues at days 3 and 14 p.i. Seroconversion to H5 influenza virus was detected in the ducklings inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) at day 14 p.i.

Table 5. Virus recovery and antibody response from mice inoculated with avian influenza virus

Inoculated virus	No. of animals	Days p.i.		Virus recovery ^a					Antibody response ^b
				Respiratory organs	Liver	Spleen	Kidneys	Brain	
Ck/Yamaguchi/04 (H5N1)	2	3–4d	dead	2 (6.3)	0	1 (3.3)	1 (2.3)	0	ND ^c
	2	3d	sacrificed	2 (6.7)	0	0	0	0	–
	4	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	+
Dk/Yokohama/03 (H5N1)	4	3d	sacrificed	3 (4.5)	0	0	0	0	–
	4	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	+
R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) (H5N1)	3	3d	sacrificed	3 (4.5)	0	0	0	0	ND
	3	14d	sacrificed	0	0	0	0	0	ND

^aDigit: number of animals in which each virus was isolated. Parenthesis: average of virus titers (logEID₅₀/g). 0 indicates no virus was isolated from animals

^bAntibody detection was examined by ELISA. –: ELISA titer was below 40. +: ELISA titer was over 40

^cNot determined

Mice

Two of the mice inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 died on day 3 p.i. and day 4 p.i. (3–4d) (Table 5). Virus was recovered only from the respiratory organs in all except one mouse, which was dead at day 4 p.i. In this mouse, the virus was recovered not only from the respiratory organs but also from the spleen and kidneys. The other four mice survived for 14 days, and specific antibodies against H5 influenza virus were detected. All of the mice inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03 and R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) survived for 14 days. The virus was recovered only from the respiratory organs of the mice at day 3 p.i. It was found that the pathogenicity of these two viruses in mice was relatively low.

Table 6. Virus recovery and antibody response from miniature pigs inoculated with avian influenza virus

Viruses	Virus titers (logTCID ₅₀ /ml)							Antibody response ^a on 14 days p.i.
	1 day	2 day	3 day	4 day	5 day	6 day	7 day	
Ck/Yamaguchi/04 (H5N1)	– ^b	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Dk/Yokohama/03 (H5N1)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) (H5N1)	–	2.7	2.5	1.7	–	–	–	+

^aAntibody detection was examined by ELISA. –: ELISA titer was below 40. +: ELISA titer was over 40

^b–: <1.5 logTCID₅₀/ml

Miniature pigs

All of the miniature pigs inoculated with the three H5N1 viruses survived for 14 days. No virus was detected in the nasal swabs of the miniature pigs inoculated either with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 or Dk/Yokohama/03 from day 1 p.i. to day 7 p.i. (Table 6). In these two miniature pigs, sero-conversion to H5 influenza virus was not detected at day 14 p.i. In another experiment with miniature pigs inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04, the virus was not recovered from any of the tissues at days 3 and 14 p.i. (data not shown). These results indicated that miniature pigs were not infected with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03. Although there were no disease signs in the miniature pig inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong), viruses were recovered from the nasal swabs between day 2 p.i. and day 4 p.i. (2–4d). Sero-conversion to H5 influenza virus was detected in the miniature pig inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong).

Discussion

The present study was conducted to determine the pathogenicity of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 in chickens, quails, budgerigars, ducklings, mice, and miniature pigs. Two H5N1 avian influenza viruses, Dk/Yokohama/03 and R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong), were compared in terms of pathogenicity with Ck/Yamaguchi/04. The intravenous pathogenicity index (IVPI) in 6-week-old chickens for Ck/Yamaguchi/04, Dk/Yokohama/03, and R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) was 3.0, 2.7, and 0.0, respectively (data not shown). Based on the present results, Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 were classified as HPAI viruses and R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong) as a non-pathogenic virus by the OIE criteria [2]. Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 caused systemic infections in birds, but showed little or no pathogenicity in mammals. The slightly longer mean death time in chickens inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03 allowed for the development of cyanosis of the wattle, typical signs of HPAI. The tendency was shown that virus of higher titer was recovered from chickens inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 than those inoculated with Dk/Yokohama/03.

The pathogenicity of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 in quails and budgerigars was as high as that of the HPAI virus, Ck/Hong Kong/220/97 (H5N1), which caused an acute and lethal infection [21]. Notably, the pathogenicity of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 in the quails seemed to be higher than that of Dk/Yokohama/03, as evidenced by the mean death times (Ck/Yamaguchi/04 vs Dk/Yokohama/03, $P = 0.05$) and the tissues from which the viruses were recovered. This difference may be due to the adaptation of isolated HPAI viruses from different hosts (chicken and duck) to quails. The greater susceptibility of quails to the virus originating from duck than from chickens is consistent with previous reports [17]. In our another experiment, Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 caused systemic infections in wild starlings (*Sturnus cineraceus*) (data not shown), indicating that feral birds could play a role as intermediates in virus transmission among poultry flocks, thereby contributing to the spread of avian influenza virus as in the outbreaks in Australia [20]. During the outbreaks of H5N1 HPAI in Japan, 2004, viruses were

isolated not only from chickens but dead crows [18]. The possibility remains that avian influenza virus is spread by the contact of wild birds with chickens.

The pathogenicity of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 for five-week-old ducks was not high compared to that for chickens and Dk/Yokohama/03 replicated more rapidly and efficiently in the multiple organs than Ck/Yamaguchi/04 in ducks [13]. In the present study, virus was recovered from multiple tissues of three-day-old ducklings inoculated either with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 or with Dk/Yokohama/03, and some of these ducklings were dead, indicating that the pathogenicity of these two viruses in three-day-old ducklings was high.

In the present study, virus was recovered from multiple tissues of only one mouse, which died at day 4 p.i. Two mice died after the inoculation of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 at an EID₅₀ of 10^{8.0} and the mortality rate of mice was only 33% (n = 6). In the latest publication, the 50% lethal dose of the same strain in mice was 5 × 10⁵ EID₅₀ under the same conditions (6-week-old female BALB/c mice via the intranasal route), and virus was also recovered from the brain [18]. The difference in pathogenicity may be due to the passage history of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 since the virus obtained from the National Institute of Animal Health (Japan) was propagated twice in embryonated chicken eggs before the present animal experiments. The pathogenicity of the H5N1 viruses isolated from humans in Hong Kong, 1997, was extremely high in mice [5, 7]. In the present study, more than half of the mice inoculated with Ck/Yamaguchi/04 survived the infection, indicating that the 50% mouse lethal dose was over 10^{8.0} EID₅₀. In conclusion, the pathogenicity of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03 in mice was much lower than that of the H5N1 viruses isolated from humans in Hong Kong, 1997.

Miniature pigs showed susceptibility to influenza virus, similarly to domestic pigs [3]. Miniature pigs were not susceptible either to Ck/Yamaguchi/04 or to Dk/Yokohama/03, but limited viral replication was observed in upper respiratory tissues in the miniature pigs inoculated with R(Dk/Mong-Dk/Mong). Therefore, the pigs may not play a major role in the maintenance and spread of Ck/Yamaguchi/04 and Dk/Yokohama/03. In contrast, H5N1 viruses isolated in 1997 from a boy (Hong Kong/156/97) and chicken (Ck/Hong Kong/258/97) replicated in pigs, although transmission through contact was not detected [24]. These results suggest that the susceptibility of pigs to avian influenza viruses has no relation to the pathogenicity of the strains in chickens or their subtypes, indicating that possible factors involved in host range restriction may be located in some gene segment(s) other than the HA gene [11, 23].

In conclusion, Ck/Yamaguchi/04 is highly pathogenic to birds and cause systemic infection, including brain. The results indicate that the susceptibility of pigs to this HPAI virus is very low, and that the possibility of genetic reassortments with this HPAI virus in pigs is not a concern.

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(H5N1) and A/duck/Yokohama/aq-10/03 (H5N1) influenza viruses, respectively. We also thank Dr. A. S. Mweene for discussing the contents of and English in this paper.

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