

# Genome-Wide Association Studies Associated with Backfat Thickness in Landrace and Yorkshire Pigs

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Although pork quality traits are important commercially, genome-wide association studies (GWASs) have not well considered Landrace and Yorkshire pigs worldwide. Landrace and Yorkshire pigs are important pork-providing breeds. Although quantitative trait loci of pigs are well-developed, significant genes in GWASs of pigs in Korea must be studied. Through a GWAS using the PLINK program, study of the significant genes in Korean pigs was performed. We conducted a GWAS and surveyed the gene ontology (GO) terms associated with the backfat thickness (BF) trait of these pigs. We included the breed information (Yorkshire and Landrace pigs) as a covariate. The significant genes after false discovery rate ( $<0.01$ ) correction were *AFG1L*, *SCAI*, *RIMS1*, and *SPDEF*. The major GO terms for the top 5% of genes were related to neuronal genes, cell morphogenesis and actin cytoskeleton organization. The neuronal genes were previously reported as being associated with backfat thickness. However, the genes in our results were novel, and they included *ZNF280D*, *BAIAP2*, *LRTM2*, *GABRA5*, *PCDH15*, *HERC1*, *DTNBP1*, *SLIT2*, *TRAPPC9*, *NGFR*, *APBB2*, *RBPJ*, and *ABL2*. These novel genes might have roles in important cellular and physiological functions related to BF accumulation. The genes related to cell morphogenesis were *NOX4*, *MKLN1*, *ZNF280D*, *BAIAP2*, *DNAAF1*, *LRTM2*, *PCDH15*, *NGFR*, *RBPJ*, *MYH9*, *APBB2*, *DTNBP1*, *TRIM62*, and *SLIT2*. The genes that belonged to actin cytoskeleton organization were *MKLN1*, *BAIAP2*, *PCDH15*, *BCAS3*, *MYH9*, *DTNBP1*, *ABL2*, *ADD2*, and *SLIT2*.

**Keywords:** backfat thickness, genome-wide association studies, Landrace, neuronal gene, Yorkshire

## Introduction

Landrace and Yorkshire pigs are commercial breeds used for pork production. The Landrace pig is a long, white pig with 16 or 17 ribs. Landrace pigs are utilized as Grandparents in the production of F1 parent stock females in a terminal crossbreeding ([http://nationalswine.com/about/about\\_breeds/landrace.php](http://nationalswine.com/about/about_breeds/landrace.php)). They outperform other pigs in litter size, birth and weaning weight, rebreeding interval, longevity and durability. Yorkshire pigs are muscular with a high proportion of lean meat. Yorkshire pigs have been maintained with great diligence, with a focus on sow productivity, growth, and backfat formation.

In Korea, the Landrace and Yorkshire breeds in Korea are used for commercial pork production. Pork quality traits are polygenic and quantitative trait loci (QTL) are associated with pork quality traits. In this regard, we analyzed genome-

wide association studies (GWASs) for backfat thickness (BF) for these breeds. BF is an important trait in pork production. Despite the importance of BF, there have not been in-depth GWAS of the BF in the Landrace and Yorkshire breeds.

Rohrer *et al.* [1] performed a genome scan for loci affecting pork quality including BF in a Duroc-Landrace F2 population. Okumura *et al.* [2] studied genomic regions affecting BF by GWAS in a Duroc pig population. Likewise, we performed a GWAS and surveyed gene ontology (GO) terms. The top 5% genes were selected for GO analysis after the GWAS. The GO terms of the top 5% genes belonged to major GO terms of neuronal genes, cell morphogenesis and actin cytoskeleton organization [3-5]. Lee *et al.* [4] used a GWAS for fat thickness in humans and pigs and found that neuronal genes were associated with fat thickness. The results of our study were similar but the genes significantly associated with BF were novel.

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## Methods

### Data preparation

The number of Landrace individuals was 1,041 and the number of Yorkshire individuals was 836. Their BF were measured and the genomic DNA of each individual Landrace or Yorkshire pig was genotyped using an Illumina Porcine 60 K SNP Beadchip (Illumina, San Diego, CA, USA). Total number of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) was 62,551 and 62,551 in the Landrace and Yorkshire breeds, respectively. After quality control (minor allele frequency  $< 0.05$ , Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium  $p < 0.0001$  and genotyping rate threshold  $< 0.05$ ), the number of SNPs in the Landrace and Yorkshire breeds was 42,654 and 57,799, respectively. After merging the data of the two breeds, the number of SNPs was 38,002.

### GWAS of BF

A GWAS using BF of Landrace and Yorkshire pigs was performed. The PLINK program was used for the GWAS [6]. The covariates were sex, parity and breed. The model used for the Landrace and Yorkshire pigs was the following:

$$y_i = \mu + \text{sex} + \text{parity} + \text{breeds} + \beta * g_i + e_i,$$

**Table 1.** Summary statistics of backfat thickness in the two pig breeds

Breed	Min	Max	Average	Standard deviation
Landrace	7.22	19.42	11.89	1.54
Yorkshire	8.44	18.04	12.70	1.49

where  $y_i$  is the backfat thickness of the  $i$ -th individual,  $\mu$  is the mean of backfat thickness in the population, sex, parity and breeds are the covariate,  $\beta$  is the beta effect in GWAS,  $g_i$  represents the SNP genotypes and  $e_i$  is the error in the model.

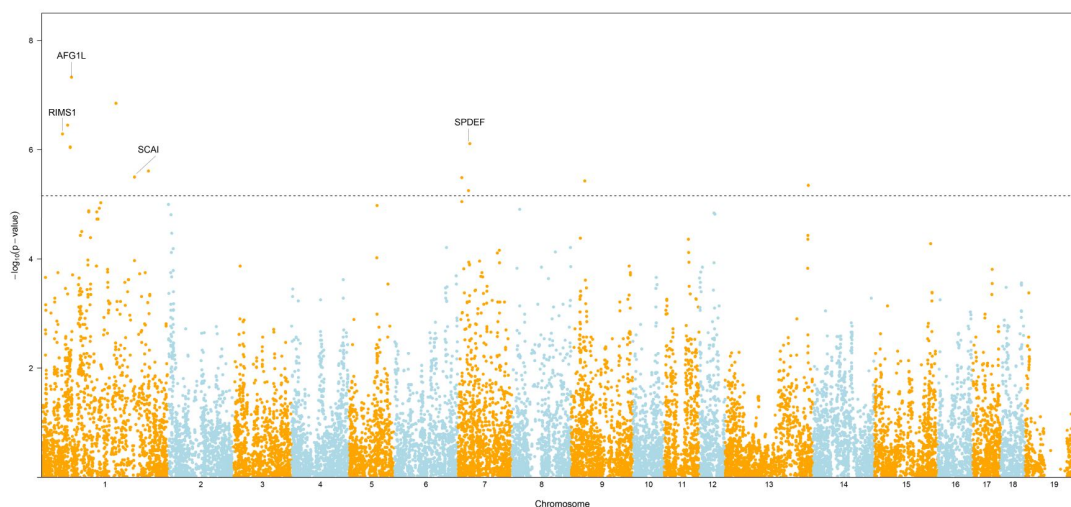
### GO analysis

We analyzed the GO of the top 5% genes (p-value order) associated with BF in Landrace and Yorkshire pigs. Because the test result with a p-value  $< 0.05$  in our study was very genial and multiple testing such as the Bonferroni correction and the false discovery rate (FDR) of our study result was very restrictive, we performed the GO analysis with the top 5% genes. The gene catalogue was retrieved from Ensemble database (<http://www.ensembl.org>) and the GO analysis was performed with the DAVID ([david.ncifcrf.gov](http://david.ncifcrf.gov); Database for Annotation, Visualization and Integrated Discovery v6.7). A list of gene identifiers was uploaded to summarize the functional annotations associated with groups or each individual genes and each biological process-related GO terms was based on the number of genes and the p-values [7, 8].

## Results

### Phenotype description

The BF statistics for Landrace pigs were 7.22 (minimum), 19.42 (maximum), 11.89 (average), and 1.54 (standard deviation). The BF statistics for Yorkshire pigs were 8.44 (minimum), 18.04 (maximum), 12.70 (average), and 1.49 (standard deviation). The average value of Yorkshire BF was greater than that of Landrace BF, while the maximum value of Yorkshire BF was less than that of Landrace pig BF. Table 1



**Fig. 1.** Mahattan plot showing the  $-\log_{10}(p\text{-value})$  for backfat thickness across chromosomes in Landrace and Yorkshire pigs in Korea. The horizontal dotted line represents an false discovery rate of 0.01.

shows the BF summary statistics of these two breeds in Korea.

### GWAS in Landrace and Yorkshire pigs

The GWAS was performed and the p-values were FDR-corrected. Fig. 1 shows the Manhattan plot across chromosomes. In our analysis, SNPs on chromosome 1 were frequent and the *SCAI*, *AFGIL*, and *RIMS1* genes on chromosome 1, *SPDEF* on chromosome 7 were the most significant genes after FDR correction. The *SCAI* gene is a suppressor of cancer cell invasion. *AFGIL* is an ATPase family gene 1 homolog. *RIMS1* is a member of the Ras superfamily of genes and a synaptic protein that regulates synaptic vesicle exocytosis. *SPDEF* encodes SAM pointed domain-containing ETS transcription factor. The boxplots of the sex and parity covariates in our model are shown (Figs. 2, 3). The figures show that females had greater BF than males. Table 2 shows the significant SNPs and those containing genes using an FDR cutoff p-value of 0.01. Most of the

significant SNPs had a positive beta effect. Fig. 4 represents the quantile-quantile plot (QQ-plot) of GWAS p-values and it shows the normality of our results. Fig. 5 illustrates the principal component analysis in Landrace and Yorkshire breeds to check the population stratification problem between Landrace and Yorkshire samples. It shows separation between Landrace and Yorkshire pigs in PC1 (Principal Component 1).

### GO analysis

A GO analysis was performed in Landrace and Yorkshire pigs in Korea. Table 3 shows the GO terms with a p-value < 0.05. The major GO terms were related to neuronal genes, cell morphogenesis and actin cytoskeleton organization and reorganization. Neuronal genes were reported to be related to subcutaneous fat thickness in human and pig [4]. However, the neuronal genes mentioned above did not match any genes in our neuron-related genes. The neuronal

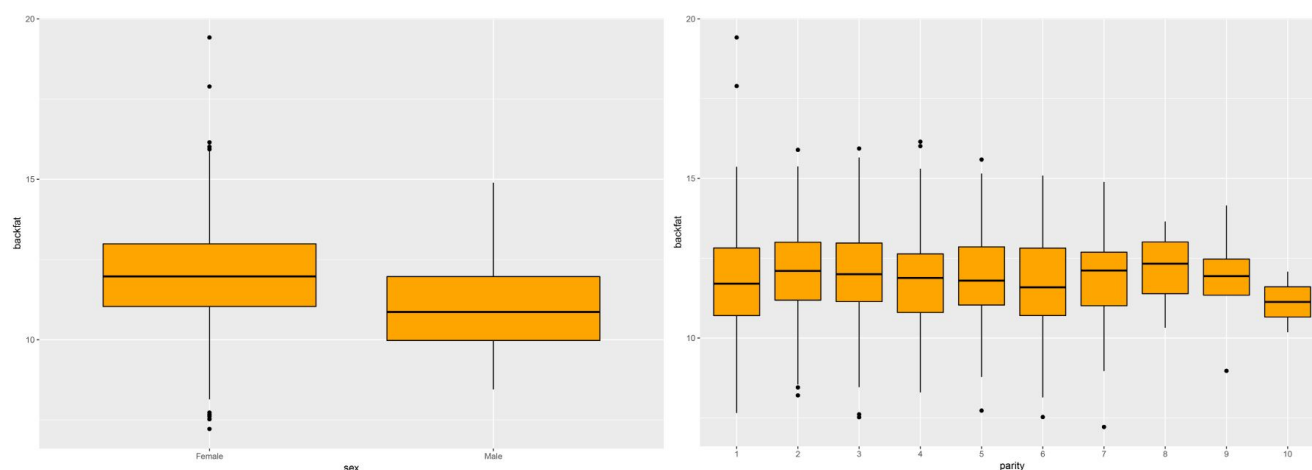


Fig. 2. Boxplots of sex and parity in Landrace pigs.

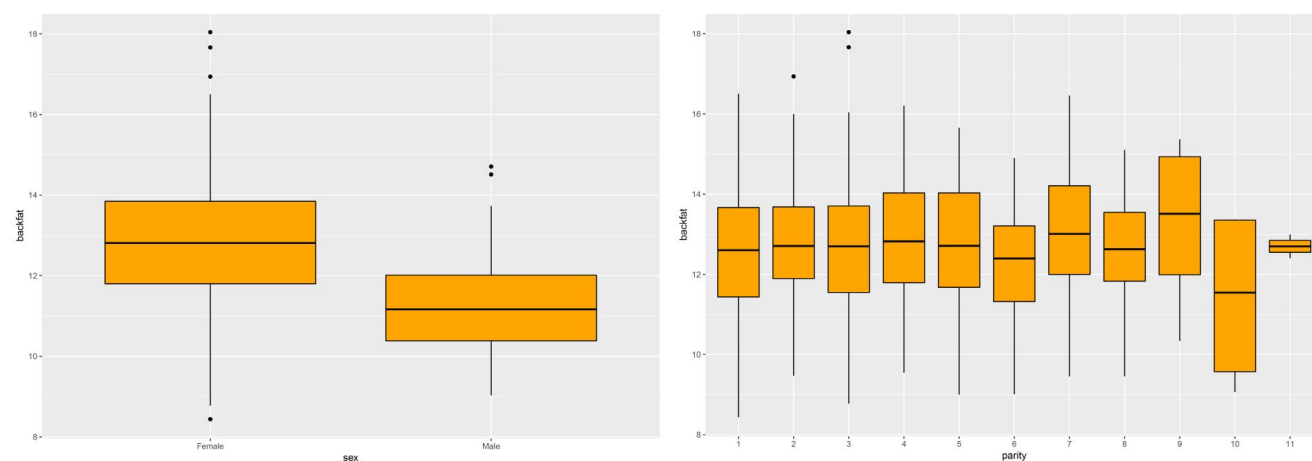


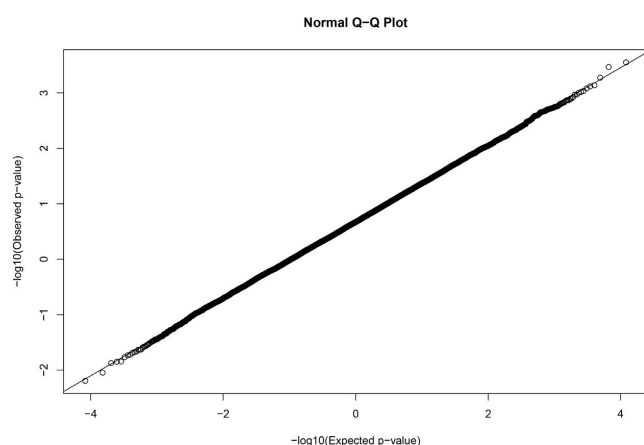
Fig. 3. Boxplots of sex and parity in Yorkshire pigs.

**Table 2.** The significant SNPs and those-containing genes associated with BF after FDR correction

Chr	SNP	Base pair	Beta	FDR	Gene
1	ALGA0003992	74,391,668	0.5628	0.0010	<i>AFG1L</i>
1	ALGA0006854	185,048,329	0.5478	0.0016	
1	ALGA0003716	65,086,290	0.4237	0.0027	
1	ALGA0003091	52,127,592	0.7812	0.0029	<i>RIMS1</i>
7	ASGA0032161	30,521,413	0.6079	0.0029	<i>SPDEF</i>
1	CASI0007774	71,401,555	0.4248	0.0029	
1	H3GA0001881	71,455,634	0.4248	0.0029	
1	DRGA0002197	265,831,621	0.3553	0.0069	<i>SCAI</i>
1	MARC0031246	231,303,178	0.4662	0.0072	
7	ASGA0031143	10,707,229	-0.3348	0.0072	
9	ALGA0104955	33,658,036	-0.348	0.0076	
13	MARC0056987	206,756,876	0.3341	0.0084	
7	ASGA0031992	27,352,011	0.3849	0.0097	

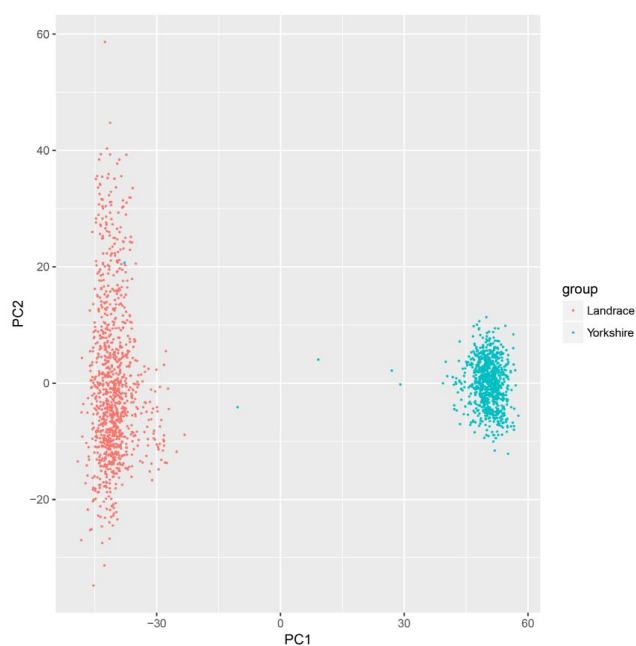
Most of the significant SNPs belonged to chromosome 1.

SNP, single nucleotide polymorphism; BF, backfat thickness; FDR, false discovery rate; *AFG1L*, AFG1 like ATPase; *RIMS1*, regulating synaptic membrane exocytosis 1; *SPDEF*, SAM pointed domain containing ETS transcription factor; *SCAI*, suppressor of cancer cell invasion.



**Fig. 4.** The quantile-quantile plot (QQ-plot) of genome-wide association study p-values. It represents the normality of our results.

genes were *ZNF280D*, *BAIAP2*, *LRTM2*, *GABRA5*, *PCDH15*, *HERC1*, *DTNBP1*, *SLIT2*, *TRAPPC9*, *NGFR*, *APBB2*, *RBPJ*, and *ABL2*. We considered the association between fat accumulation and these neuronal genes to be novel. The cell morphogenesis genes were *NOX4*, *MKLN1*, *ZNF280D*, *BAIAP2*, *DNAAF1*, *LRTM2*, *PCDH15*, *NGFR*, *RBPJ*, *MYH9*, *APBB2*, *DTNBP1*, *TRIM62*, and *SLIT2*. In addition, the actin cytoskeleton organization and reorganization genes were *MKLN1*, *BAIAP2*, *PCDH15*, *BCAS3*, *MYH9*, *DTNBP1*, *ABL2*, *ADD2*, and *SLIT2*. Among these genes, *PCDH15* is related to individual noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) susceptibility. NIHL is a commonly recorded disorder, accounting for 7% to 21% of hearing loss [9]. *NGFR* is the nerve growth factor receptor [10] and dystrobrevin-binding protein 1 (*DTNBP1*) is an NMDA-receptor mediated signaling gene. NMDA is



**Fig. 5.** Principal component analysis in Landrace and Yorkshire pigs to check the population stratification problem between Landrace and Yorkshire pigs.

N-methyl-D-aspartate and *DTNBP1* has the ability to modulate synaptic plasticity and glutamatergic transmission through NMDA receptors [11]. *BAIAP2* is the brain-specific angiogenesis inhibitor-1 associated protein gene [12].

**Table 3.** GO terms of the top 5% genes associated with backfat thickness

Term	Count	p-value	Gene	Fold enrichment
GO:0031532~actin cytoskeleton reorganization	5	8.26E-04	<i>MKLN1, BAIAP2, BCAS3, MYH9, DTNBP1</i>	11.67
GO:0040011~locomotion	15	0.01	<i>ZNF280D, ITGA11, SCAI, DOCK8, CD151, MYH9, RUFY3, SLIT2, PTK2, NGFR, BCAS3, APBB2, ABL2, CLN6, CYP19A1</i>	2.03
GO:0030036~actin cytoskeleton organization	9	0.01	<i>MKLN1, BAIAP2, PCDH15, BCAS3, MYH9, DTNBP1, ABL2, ADD2, SLIT2</i>	2.90
GO:0000902~cell morphogenesis	14	0.01	<i>NOX4, MKLN1, ZNF280D, BAIAP2, DNAAF1, LRTM2, PCDH15, NGFR, RBPJ, MYH9, APBB2, DTNBP1, TRIM62, SLIT2</i>	2.11
GO:0000904~cell morphogenesis involved in differentiation	10	0.02	<i>ZNF280D, LRTM2, PCDH15, NGFR, RBPJ, MYH9, APBB2, DTNBP1, TRIM62, SLIT2</i>	2.55
GO:1901187~regulation of ephrin receptor signaling pathway	2	0.02	<i>ANKS1A, RBPJ</i>	107.38
GO:0030182~neuron differentiation	13	0.02	<i>ZNF280D, BAIAP2, LRTM2, GABRA5, PCDH15, HERC1, DTNBP1, SLIT2, TRAPPC9, NGFR, APBB2, RBPJ, ABL2</i>	2.11
GO:0048666~neuron development	11	0.02	<i>ZNF280D, BAIAP2, GABRA5, LRTM2, PCDH15, NGFR, HERC1, APBB2, DTNBP1, ABL2, SLIT2</i>	2.29
GO:0032989~cellular component morphogenesis	14	0.02	<i>NOX4, MKLN1, ZNF280D, BAIAP2, DNAAF1, LRTM2, PCDH15, NGFR, RBPJ, MYH9, APBB2, DTNBP1, TRIM62, SLIT2</i>	1.99
GO:0050804~modulation of synaptic transmission	5	0.02	<i>GRM4, BAIAP2, RIN1, DTNBP1, RIMS4</i>	4.67
GO:0030030~cell projection organization	13	0.02	<i>ZNF280D, BAIAP2, DNAAF1, LRTM2, PCDH15, NGFR, BCAS3, MYH9, HERC1, APBB2, DTNBP1, ABL2, SLIT2</i>	2.03
GO:0030029~actin filament-based process	9	0.03	<i>MKLN1, BAIAP2, PCDH15, BCAS3, MYH9, DTNBP1, ABL2, ADD2, SLIT2</i>	2.51
GO:0010455~positive regulation of cell fate commitment	2	0.03	<i>SPDEF, RBPJ</i>	71.59
GO:0048699~generation of neurons	13	0.04	<i>ZNF280D, BAIAP2, LRTM2, GABRA5, PCDH15, HERC1, DTNBP1, SLIT2, TRAPPC9, NGFR, APBB2, RBPJ, ABL2</i>	1.90
GO:0048667~cell morphogenesis involved in neuron differentiation	7	0.04	<i>ZNF280D, LRTM2, PCDH15, NGFR, APBB2, DTNBP1, SLIT2</i>	2.77
GO:1903047~mitotic cell cycle process	8	0.04	<i>ANKRD17, SIN3A, TUBGCP5, USP8, RAD21, CCNY, CAMK2D, CENPE</i>	2.48
GO:0031175~neuron projection development	9	0.04	<i>ZNF280D, BAIAP2, LRTM2, NGFR, HERC1, APBB2, DTNBP1, ABL2, SLIT2</i>	2.26

The major gene ontology (GO) terms were neuron-related, cell morphogenesis, and actin cytoskeleton organization, and reorganization.

## Discussion

### Genome-wide association studies

The commercial pig breeds in Korea are mainly the Landrace, Yorkshire, Duroc and Berkshire breeds. Among these breeds, we analyzed GWASs of backfat thickness using the Landrace and Yorkshire breeds. Although there is a pig QTL database (QTL DB, <https://www.animalgenome.org>) associated with BF, we aimed to determine the significant variants and those containing genes by using the Korean pig population. While the QTL DB provides much information

about QTL and significant genes, detailed information about the significant genes is not available. Thus, a GWAS should be performed with the QTL information.

### Neuron-related terms in the GO analysis

It was reported that neuronal genes are closely related to fat accumulation [4]. Lee *et al.* [4] used local genomic sequencing and SNP association to identify genes for subcutaneous fat thickness. They reported that *NEGR1*, *SLC44A5*, *PDE4B*, *LPHN2*, *ELTD1*, *ST6GALNAC5*, and *TLL7* are fat-associated neuronal genes. However, in our analysis,



these genes did not appear. This may be because the aforementioned study used Korean native pig. We examined BF in Korean Landrace pigs. Despite this difference, neuron-related terms were also major ones in our analysis. In Yorkshire pigs, neuronal genes were also found. The neuronal genes *ZNF280D*, *BAIAP2*, *LRTM2*, *GABRA5*, *PCDH15*, *HERC1*, *DTNBP1*, *SLIT2*, *TRAPPC9*, *NGFR*, *APBB2*, *RBPJ*, and *ABL2* were not yet reported. In our study, these genes reported in the GWAS of pigs but they have been reported in GWASs of cattle, chickens, and sheep.

### Actin cytoskeleton organization and cell morphogenesis genes

Among the actin cytoskeleton organization genes and cell morphogenesis genes, *PCDH15*, *NGFR*, *DTNBP1*, and *BAIAP2* are also neuronal genes and thus can be classified into the GO terms of neuronal genes. These genes obviously play a role as neuronal genes, actin cytoskeleton organization genes (*BAIAP2* gene) and cell morphogenesis genes (*PCDH15*, *NGFR*, and *DTNBP1* genes). These genes not only play a role as neuronal genes but also act as actin cytoskeleton organization and cell morphogenesis genes. Interestingly, these neuronal genes are associated with brain function, nerves and diseases. Thus, some of the backfat-associated genes play a neuronal role. We expect that how backfat and neuronal genes or neuropathic genes are related to each other will be revealed.

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### Authors' contribution

Conceptualization: YSL, DS  
 Data curation: DS  
 Formal analysis: YSL  
 Methodology: YSL, DS  
 Writing – original draft: YSL  
 Writing – review & editing: YSL, DS

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