

# Detection of gene expression and sequence analysis of chicken class II trans activator (*CIITA*)

Khosravi, M., Nikbakht, Gh.\*

<sup>1</sup>Department of Microbiology and Immunology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

## Key words:

chicken, *CIITA* gene expression, immunity

## Correspondence

Nikbakht, Gh.  
Department of Microbiology and Immunology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran  
Tel: +98(21) 61117057  
Fax: +98(21) 66427517  
Email: nikbakht@ut.ac.ir

Received: 9 September 2013

Accepted: 3 December 2013

## Abstract:

**BACKGROUND:** Class II transactivator (*CIITA*) is a dominant transcriptional element, controlling numerous genes in the immune system. *CIITA* is expressed in a constitutive pattern in antigen presenting cells although its expression can occur in other cell types. Since the revelation of *CIITA*, there have been considerable advances toward understanding its role as an activator of MHC II genes in humans and mice; nonetheless, there is a lack of published data for this gene in other animals such as chickens. **OBJECTIVES:** The goals of this study were to determine the expression of class II transactivator (*CIITA*) in chicken and analysis of the *CIITA* gene sequence between four Iranian indigenous chicken ecotypes. **METHODS:** After securing the research accuracy and optimization of reaction conditions, cDNA and DNA samples of gene were obtained from four Iranian indigenous chicken ecotypes. The PCR and RT-PCR products were sequenced and the data were analyzed by bioinformatics software. **RESULTS:** Comparison of the sequencing results with the reference sequence of the red jungle fowl revealed that these sequences belonged to the predicted *CIITA* gene. There was a high conservation rate in the sequence of *CIITA*. **CONCLUSIONS:** Our results indicated that like other species, *CIITA* is transcribed in chickens' immune system cells. Further studies on chickens must be done to reveal *CIITA* roles in immune responses of chickens.

## Introduction

Class II transactivator (*CIITA*) is an effective transcriptional factor regulating various genes in the immune system (Harton and Jenny, 2000). *CIITA* is a member of a famous family of cytosolic proteins under numerous names, including NOD and NACHT proteins containing caspase activation and recruitment domain (CARD). The Nod like receptors (NLR) family is an evolutionary important immune gene as it consists of three distinct conserved motifs. Main features in the principal amino acid sequence of *CIITA* include an N-terminal section with acidic amino acids, three segments rich in proline, serine and threonine, a centrally placed GTP binding domain, and a C-terminal area consisting of leucine

rich repeats (LRR) (Ting and Davis, 2005). *CIITA* is the only component of NLR family that has an N-terminal transcription activation domain with recognized function as a transcription activator (Krawczyk and Reith, 2006).

*CIITA* is expressed in a constitutive manner on macrophages, B lymphocytes, and dendritic cells (Muhlethaler et al., 1997) although its expression can be induced on various tissues by IFN- $\gamma$  (Steimle et al., 1994). *CIITA* is expressed in activated human T cells, which is related to class II MHC, but not in mouse T cells (Harton and Jenny, 2000). Microarray experiments recognized over 40 genes that were anticipated to be regulated by *CIITA* (Nagarajan et al., 2002). Genes proposed to be withdrawn by *CIITA* consist of those encoding interleukine-4 (IL4), Fas ligand (Fas

L), cathepsin E, IL10, collagen type I a2 (COL1a2), tyrosine kinase, cyclin D1, and 16 other proteins with various functions (Sisk et al., 2000 and Nagarajan et al., 2002). Recently, it has been revealed that *CIITA* plays an important role in fighting against infectious diseases, cancer, and autoimmunity (Rasmussen et al., 2001). *CIITA* is necessary for the regulation and transcription of major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II genes in the normal immune reaction; therefore, it is a regulator for antigen presentation to CD4 T cells and often referred as the master regulator of MHC class II expression (Harton and Jenny, 2000). It is a non DNA-binding co-activator that is recruited to MHC promoters via many proteins bound to DNA (Zhu et al., 2000). The relationship between the expression of MHC class II molecules and the expression of *CIITA* was well defined (Day et al., 2003).

Since the detection of *CIITA* in 1993, there have been considerable progresses toward understanding its role as an activator of *MHC II* genes in humans and mice (Cheong et al., 2002); however, there are a few published data for this gene in other animals such as chickens. The results of in vitro experiments on *CIITA* gene have indications for practical applications. Transitory stimulation or inhibition of class II MHC expression, can hang the immune response during important situations (reviewed in Harton and Jenny, 2000, Waldburger et al., 2000, Kuipers and Elsen, 2005). By understanding the structure and function of *CIITA*, we could be able to use it in vaccination, prevention, and treatment of chicken diseases. Genetic variation in chicken populations would reveal the effects of polymorphism on the *CIITA* functions and occupation of different parts of *CIITA* in gene regulation. Finally, chickens could be as a laboratory animal for research purposes.

The goals of the present study were to determine the expression and phylogenetically analysis of chickens' class II transactivator gene. Sequence comparisons of the *CIITA* gene segment from four Iranian indigenous chicken ecotypes with related sequences from red jungle fowl is another purpose which discloses the genetic variation of this gene.

## Materials and Methods

### Sampling and isolation of genomic DNA: Four

Iranian indigenous chicken ecotypes, consisting of local chickens of Mazandran, Isfahan, Urmia, Khorasan, along with Ross 308 chickens, were examined. Blood samples with EDTA were collected and preserved at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Genomic DNA was isolated from whole blood using the extraction kit (AccuPrep Genomic DNA Extraction Kit Cat. No. K-3032, Bioneer corporation, Korea) as recommended by the manufacturer, and it was dissolved in deionized water for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis.

**PCR condition and procedures:** The specific primer sequences used for the amplification of *CIITA* gene in chicken are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. These primers were designed according to the sequence of inbred red jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus*), retrieved from the Ensemble database (ENSGALG-00000007171, Chromosome 14: 9, 290, 165-9, 298, 267). The expected size of the PCR products was around 388 and 259 bp.

The PCR mixture (total volume 25  $\mu\text{L}$ ) contained genomic DNA (0.5-1  $\mu\text{L}$ ), 2.5  $\mu\text{L}$  of 10 mmol/L PCR buffer, 0.75  $\mu\text{L}$  of 50 mmol/L  $\text{MgCl}_2$ , 4  $\mu\text{L}$  of 1.25 mmol/L dNTPs, 14  $\mu\text{L}$  of distilled water, and 1 unit of Taq DNA polymerase (Cinnagen Co., Tehran, Iran). In addition, primer sets 1 and 2 were added at 1  $\mu\text{L}$  into the reaction at two separate mixes. The PCR mixture was pre-denatured at  $95^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 3 min, followed by 30 cycles of denaturation at  $95^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 30s, annealing at  $62^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 30s, and an extension at  $72^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 40s, and the final extension at  $72^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 5min. The amplified fragments were run on a 1.7% agarose gel and visualized in gel document system after staining with ethidium bromide.

**RNA isolation and reverse transcription PCR:** RNA was isolated from spleen and Buffy coat of Ross 308 chicken using TRIzol/TriPure (Roche, Germany) and then the RNA was digested with RNase-free DNase (Fermentas, Germany) according to manufacturer's instructions. To synthesize the first-strand cDNA, the RNA reverse-transcribed in a reaction with total volume of 20  $\mu\text{L}$  by using random hexamer hexanucleotide primer and M-MLV reverse transcriptase (Invitrogen), according to manufacturer's instructions. The prepared cDNA was amplified using Taq DNA polymerase (Cinnagen Co., Tehran, Iran) and the specific primers for *CIITA*. PCR conditions and procedures were the same as the conditions and procedures described above.

Table 1. Primer sequences for the PCR amplification of chicken *CIITA* gene.

Primer name	Sequence (5'->3')	Nucleotide position	Product length
F1	ACTTTGAAGGATTACCCTCGTGCG	9069059- 9069082	388
R1	TGGGGAATGCAAATGGCAGGAA	9068699- 9068720	
F2	TGGGAGATCAAGGCCTTCCTCAA	9068930- 9068953	259
R2	TGTTTGGGGAATGCAAATGGCAGG	9068695- 90686718	

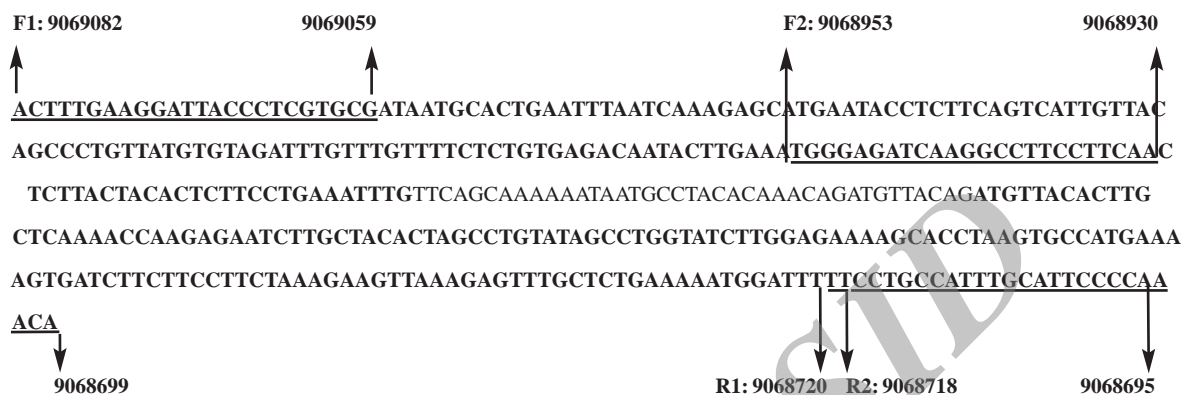


Figure 1. Primer sequences and locations for the amplification of chicken *CIITA* gene. The exonic regions are bolded.

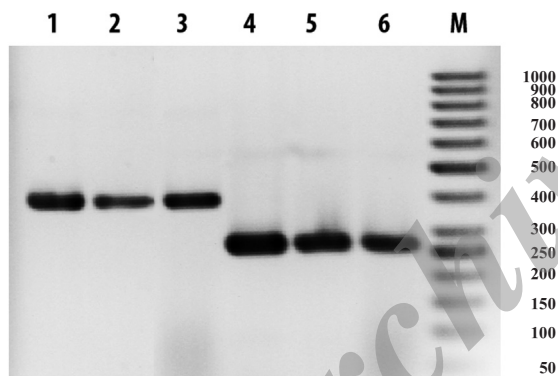


Figure 2. Electrophoresis of PCR products by using primer set 1 (lanes 1- 3) and primer set 2 (lanes 4- 6); Lanes 1 and 4: extracted DNA samples,; 2 and 5: cDNA samples from WBC, 3 and 6: cDNA Samples from the spleen and M: Marker (50 bp ladder) (Fermentas, Germany).

**Direct sequencing and data analysis:** The PCR products were purified using the purification kit (Bioneer, Cat. No. K-3034) and were also bidirectionally sequenced by using forward and reverse (F1 and R1) primers by an automatic DNA sequencer (ABI 3730 XL, Bioneer, South Korea). Sequences were analyzed by BLAST through the national center for biotechnology information website. The sequence alignment was made using clustal software, and the

amino acids prediction was done using the Bioedit version 7.0.5.3 software package.

**Phylogenetic analysis:** The *CIITA* sequences from other organisms with the following accession numbers: *Homo sapiens* NM-000246, *Macaca mulatta* NC-007877, *Mus musculus* AK-080723, *Taeniopygia guttata* XM-002195026, *Meleagris gallopavo* MX-003210727, *Rattus norvegicus* NM-053529, *Cricetulus griseus* NW-00361363, and *Heterocephalus glaber* EHB13615 were obtained from the NCBI Genome database and were compared by phylogenetic analysis, using MEGA4 software.

## Results

PCR produced 388 and 259 base pair amplification products from *CIITA* gene (DNA and cDNA) of chickens, regardless of their ecotypes (Figure 2).

The amplified products of cDNA show the same molecular weight as PCR products (Figure 2).

Comparison of Our sequences with the sequence of the red jungle fowl revealed that these sequences belonged to the predicted *CIITA* gene. Sequence analysis showed no nucleotide mutation in the sequences (Figure 3). In contrast with the Ensemble data, this area is free of introns.

ACT TTGAAG GAT TAC CCT CGT GCGATAATG CAC TGAATT TAA TCAAAG AGCATGAAT ACC TCT TCA GTC ATT GTT ACA {78}

GCC CTG TTA TGT GTA GAT TTG TTT GTT TTC TCT GTGAGA CAA TAC TTG AAA TGG GAGATC AAG GCCTTC CTT CAA CTC {156}

TTA CTACAC TCT TCC TGAAAT TTG TTC AGC AAAAAA TAA TGC CTACAC AAA CAGATG TTA CAG ATG TTA CAC TTG CTC {234}

AAAACCAAGAGAATC TTG CTA CAC TAG CCT GTATAG CCT GGTATC TTG GAGAAAAGCACC TAA GTG CCATGAAAA GTG {312}

ATC TTC TTC CTT CTAAGAAG TTAAGAGT TTG CTC TGAAAAATG GAT TTT TCC TGC CAT TTG CAT TCC CCAAACA {388}

Figure 3. Nucleotide sequences of four Iranian ecotypes and Ross 308 chickens DNA and cDNA.

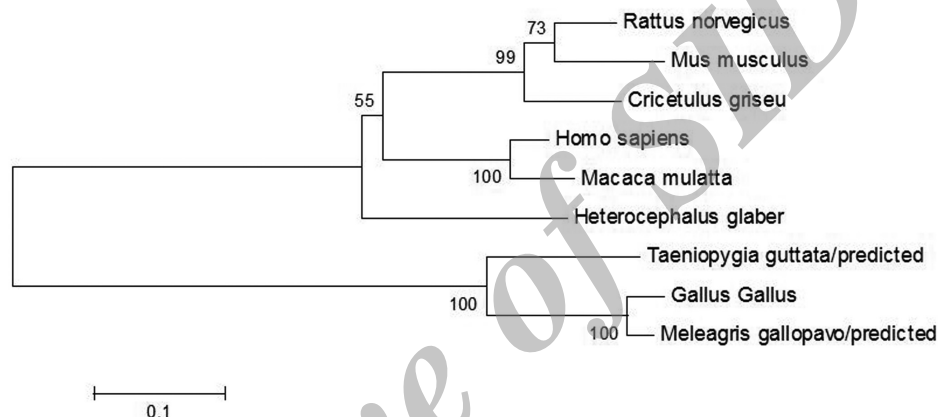


Figure 4. Phylogenetic tree of *CIITA* Gene sequence which was constructed by using neighbor-joining method.

The results of phylogenetics analysis are shown in figures 4. Phylogenetic tree consisted of two main clusters namely, mammals and birds. *Gallus gallus* was much closer to *Meleagris gallopavo* than *Taeniopygia guttata*.

## Discussion

Gene's data from any completely sequenced genome give numerous levels of information. The creation of a high quality draft sequence of the chicken genome is a main progress in the field of animal genetics (International Chicken Polymorphism Map Consortium, 2004). Accessible sequence from the chicken included apparent orthologs of *CIITA*. The apparent orthologs of *CIITA* supports the suggestion that this protein originated as a result of gene duplications before the bird-mammal deviation; anticipated to have occurred 310 million years ago (Hughes A, 2006). Comparative investigation of

genomes can be used to find conserved sequence elements, which may include formerly unknown genes. Comparison of two closely allied species like humans and mice will help us to find many conserved regions within coding and non-coding DNA. In contrast, a comparison between distantly related groups, such as fish and humans may detect only well-conserved exonic sequences; chicken represents an intermediate level of evolutionary distance, which makes them very useful for determining the essential features of vertebrate genomes (Furlong, 2005).

Our results indicated that the mRNA of *CIITA* is present in the chicken blood leukocytes and spleen cells. According to NCBI data, the sequence of this gene in humans is defined by synthesizing cDNA from different sources including lymph, germinal center B cells, lymphoma, cell lines, lung and uterus tumors, bone marrow, and some other tissues. In mice, the sequence of this gene is obtained from cDNA of tissues such as 4-cell stage embryo, aorta,



vein, spleen, thymus, kidney, germinal center B cells and mammary.

Sequencing analysis of different Iranian chicken ecotypes indicated that the studied fragments are highly conserved. According to the database (Beijing Genomics Institute, NCBI-dbSNP: International Chicken Polymorphism Map Consortium, 2004), at the position of 9297624\_ the single nucleotide polymorphism (C-T) exists in different genotype; however, our results did not show this variation.

Certain duplications of the genes encoding Nod like receptors (NLR) preceded the divergence of tetrapods and bony fishes, occurring about 450 million years ago (Kumar and Hedges 1998). The function of *CIITA* in the regulation expression of the class II MHC molecules, supported by the presence of the *CIITA* gene in bony fishes, as well as birds and mammals, are known to be present in all jawed vertebrates (Kelley et al., 2005). Functional description of NLRs, particularly in lower vertebrates, would elucidate the *CIITA* evolution (Liu et al., 2012). Our phylogenetic results for mRNA sequences corroborates the findings of Hughes (2006) and Liu (2012) who reported that the phylogenetic tree with the same arrangement was mainly divided into two clusters.

This study evaluated DNA sequences and gene expression of chicken *CIITA*. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first report on *CIITA* expression in chickens. The primers used in this study were designed according to the related sequences in the Ensemble database. As expected, based on human and mouse information, the *CIITA* sequence is also highly conserved among different chicken ecotypes. In addition, the gene expression in leukocytes and spleen may indicate that *CIITA* protein is important in the immune responses of chickens as well as humans and other animals.

## Acknowledgments

The University of Tehran supported this work; grant No. 7502015/6/22.

## References

1. Chang, H.C., Fontes, J.D., Peterlin, M., Flavell, R.A. (1994) Class II transactivator is sufficient for the

- inducible expression of major histocompatibility complex class II genes. *J Exp Med.* 180: 1367-1374.
2. Cheong, H.C., Gourley, T.S., Sisk, T.J. (2002) Function and regulation of class II transactivator in the immune system. *Immunol Res.* 25: 131-142.
3. Day, E.N., Ugai, H., Yokoyama, K., Ichiki, A.T. (2003) K-562 cells lack MHC class II expression due to an alternatively spliced *CIITA* transcript with a truncated coding region. *Leuk Res.* 27: 1027-1038.
4. Furlong, R.F. (2005) Insights into vertebrate evolution from the chicken genome sequence. *Genom Biol.* 6: 207.
5. Harton, J.A., Jenny, P.Y. (2000) Class II transactivator: Mastering the art of major histocompatibility complex expression. *Mol Cell Biol.* 20: 6185-6194.
6. Hughes, A.L. (2006) Evolutionary relationships of vertebrate NACHT Domain-containing proteins. *Immunogenetics.* 58: 785-791.
7. International Chicken Polymorphism Map Consortium (2004) A genetic variation map for chicken with 2.8 million single-nucleotide polymorphisms. *Nature.* 432: 717-722.
8. Kelley, J., Walter, L., Trowsdale, J. (2005) Comparative genomics of major histocompatibility complexes. *Immunogenetics.* 56: 683-695.
9. Krawczyk, M., Reith, W. (2006) Regulation of MHC class II expression, a unique regulatory system identified by the study of a primary immunodeficiency. *J Compilation.* 67: 183-197.
10. Kuipers, H.F., van den Elsen, P.J. (2005) Statins and control of *MHC2TA* gene transcription. *Nat Med.* 11: 365-366.
11. Kumar, S., Hedges, S.B. (1998) A molecular time-scale for vertebrate evolution. *Nature.* 392: 917-920.
12. Liu, Y., Meng, Y., Wang, Q., Sha, Z. (2012) Class II major histocompatibility complex, transactivator (*CIITA*) in channel catfish: identification and expression patterns responding to different pathogens. *Mol Biol Rep.* 39: 11041-11050.
13. Muhlethaler, M.A., Otten, L.A., Steimle, V., Mach, B. (1997) Expression of MHC class II molecules in different cellular and functional compartments is controlled by differential usage of multiple promoters of the transactivator *CIITA*. *EMBO J.* 16: 2851-2860.
14. Nagarajan, U.M., Bushey, A., Boss, J.M. (2002) Modulation of gene expression by the MHC class II

- transactivator. *J Immunol.* 169: 5078-88.
15. Rasmussen, H.B., Kelly, M.A., Clausen, J. (2001) Genetic susceptibility to multiple sclerosis: detection of polymorphic nucleotides and an intron 3' untranslated region of the major histocompatibility complex class II transactivator gene. *Hum Immunol.* 62: 371-377.
  16. Sisk, T.J., Gourley, T., Roys, S., Chang, C.H. (2000) MHC class II transactivator inhibits IL-4 gene transcription by competing with NF-AT to bind the coactivator CREB binding protein (CBP) /p300. *J Immunol.* 165: 2511-2517.
  17. Steimle, V., Siegrist, C.A., Mottet, A., Lisowska-Grospierre, B., Mach, B. (1994) Regulation of MHC class II expression by interferon-gamma mediated by the transactivator gene *CIITA*. *Science.* 265: 106-109.
  18. Ting, J.P., Davis, B.K. (2005) CATERPILLER: A novel gene family important in immunity, cell death, and diseases. *Ann Rev Immunol.* 23: 387-414.
  19. Waldburger, J.M., Masternak, K., Mottet, A.M., Villard, J., Peretti, M., Landmann, M., Reith, W. (2000) Lessons from the bare lymphocyte syndrome: molecular mechanisms regulating MHC class II expression. *Immunol Rev.* 178: 148-165.
  20. Zhu, X.S., Linhoff, M.W., Guoxuan, L., Chin, K.C., Maity, S., Ting, J.Y. (2000) Transcriptional Scaffold: *CIITA* Interacts with NF-Y, RFX, and CREB To cause stereospecific regulation of the class II major histocompatibility complex promoter. *Mol Cell Biol.* 20: 6051-6061.

## بررسی بیان و آنالیز توالی ژن *CIITA* در ماکیان

محمد خسروی غلامرضا نیکبخت\*

گروه میکروبیولوژی و ایمنولوژی، دانشکده دامپزشکی دانشگاه تهران، تهران، ایران

(دریافت مقاله: ۱۸ شهریورماه ۱۳۹۲، پذیرش نهایی: ۱۲ آذرماه ۱۳۹۲)

### چکیده

**زمینه مطالعه:** فعال کننده ترانس کلاس دو (*CIITA*) از عوامل تنظیم کننده رونوشت برداری است که بیان چندین ژن در سیستم ایمنی را کنترل می نماید. بیان *CIITA* می تواند به صورت دائمی در سلول های عرضه کننده پادگن و یا به صورت القایی در دیگر سلول های بدن باشد. در سال های اخیر پیشرفت هایی در زمینه درک نقش این مولکول در انسان و موش حاصل شده است ولی در زمینه این ژن در سایر حیوانات از قبیل ماکیان اطلاعات منتشر شده ای وجود ندارد. **هدف:** هدف این مطالعه بررسی بیان ژن *CIITA* و مطالعه فیلوژنتیکی توالی آن است. مقایسه توالی ژن *CIITA* در طیور بومی ایران با توالی *red jungle fowl* به منظور مشخص نمودن تغییرات از دیگر اهداف است. **روش کار:** پس از اطمینان از صحت آزمایش و بهینه سازی واکنش، DNA و cDNA مربوط به ژن مورد نظر از چهار سویه ماکیان بومی ایران به دست آمد. نمونه های حاصل از PCR و RT-PCR پس از تعیین توالی توسط نرم افزارهای بیوانفورماتیک مورد بررسی قرار گرفتند. **نتایج:** نتایج این تحقیق نشان دهنده بیان ژن *CIITA* در گلبول های سفید خون و طحال ماکیان است. برخلاف اطلاعات موجود در پایگاه های اطلاعاتی ناحیه مورد بررسی فاقد اینترون می باشد. **نتیجه گیری نهایی:** قطعه بررسی شده در ماکیان همانند انسان و سایر حیوانات بسیار حفاظت شده است. بیان ژن *CIITA* در ماکیان بیانگر آن است که احتمالاً این پروتئین در پاسخ ایمنی ماکیان نیز همانند انسان و سایر حیوانات نقش دارد که لازم است در مطالعات آینده روشن شود.

واژه های کلیدی: ماکیان، بیان ژن *CIITA*، ایمنی

(\* نویسنده مسؤول: تلفن: ۹۸(۲۱)۶۱۱۱۷۰۵۷، شماره: ۹۸(۲۱)۶۶۴۲۷۵۱۷، Email: nikbakht@ut.ac.ir

Archive of SID